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YVETTE
AND OTHER STORIES



YVETTE AND OTHER STORIES

BY
GUY DE MAUPASSANT

TRANSLATED BY
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WITH A PREFACE BY
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PREFACE

To introduce Maupassant to English readers with apologetic explanations as though his art were recondite and the tendency of his work immoral would be a gratuitous impertinence.

Maupassant's conception of his art is such as one would expect from a practical and resolute mind; but in the consummate simplicity of his technique it ceases to be perceptible. This is one of its greatest qualities, and like all the great virtues it is based primarily on self-denial.

To pronounce a judgment upon the general tendency of an author is a difficult task. One could not depend upon reason alone, nor yet trust solely to one's emotions. Used together, they would in many cases traverse each other, because emotions have their own unanswerable logic. Our capacity for emotion is limited, and the field of our intelligence is restricted. Responsiveness to every feeling, combined with the penetration of every intellectual subterfuge, would end, not in judgment, but in universal absolution. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.* And in this

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benevolent neutrality towards the warring errors of human nature all light would go out from art and from life.

We are at liberty then to quarrel with Maupassant's attitude towards our world in which, like the rest of us, he has that share which his senses are able to give him. But we need not quarrel with him violently. If our feelings (which are tender) happen to be hurt because his talent is not exercised for the praise and consolation of mankind, our intelligence (which is great) should let us see that he is a very splendid sinner, like all those who in this valley of compromises err by over-devotion to the truth that is in them. His determinism, barren of praise, blame, and consolation, has all the merit of his conscientious art. The worth of every conviction consists precisely in the steadfastness with which it is held.

Except for his philosophy, which in the case of so consummate an artist does not matter (unless to the solemn and naïve mind), Maupassant of all writers of fiction demands least forgiveness from his readers. He does not require forgiveness because he is never dull.

The interest of a reader in a work of imagination is either ethical or that of simple curiosity. Both are perfectly legitimate, since there is both a moral and excitement to be found in a faithful rendering of life. And in

Maupassant's work there is the interest of curiosity and the moral of a point of view consistently preserved and never obtruded for the end of personal gratification. The spectacle of this immense talent served by exceptional faculties triumphing over the most thankless subjects by an unswerving singleness of purpose is in itself an admirable lesson in the power of artistic honesty, one may say of artistic virtue. The inherent greatness of the man consists in this, that he will let none of the fascinations that beset a writer working in loneliness turn him away from the straight path, from the vouchsafed vision of excellence. He will not be led into perdition by the seductions of sentiment, of eloquence, of humour, of pathos; of all that splendid pageant of faults that pass between the writer and his probity on the blank sheet of paper, like the glittering cortège of deadly sins before the austere anchorite in the desert air of Thebæide. This is not to say that Maupassant's austerity has never faltered; but the fact remains that no tempting demon has ever succeeded in hurling him down from his high, if narrow, pedestal.

It is the austerity of his talent, of course, that is in question. Let the discriminating reader, who at times may well spare a moment or two to the consideration and enjoyment of artistic excellence, be asked to reflect

a little upon the texture of two stories included in this volume: "A Piece of String," and "A Sale." How many openings the last offers for the gratuitous display of the author's wit or clever buffoonery, the first for an unmeasured display of sentiment. And both sentiment and buffoonery could have been made very good too, in a way accessible to the meanest intelligence, at the cost of truth and honesty. Here it is where Maupassant's austerity comes in. He refrains from setting his cleverness against the eloquence of the facts. There is humour and pathos in these stories; but such is the greatness of his talent, the refinement of his artistic conscience, that all his high qualities appear inherent in the very things of which he speaks, as if they had been altogether independent of his presentation. Facts, and again facts are his unique concern. That is why he is not always properly understood. His facts are so perfectly rendered that, like the actualities of life itself, they demand from the reader that faculty of observation which is rare, the power of appreciation which is generally wanting in most of us who are guided mainly by empty phrases requiring no effort, demanding from us no qualities except a vague susceptibility to emotion. Nobody had ever gained the vast applause of a crowd by the simple and clear exposition of vital facts. Words alone strung

upon a convention have fascinated us as worthless glass beads strung on a thread have charmed at all times our brothers the unsophisticated savages of the islands. Now, Maupassant, of whom it has been said that he is the master of the *mot juste*, has never been a dealer in words. His wares have been, not glass beads, but polished gems: not the most rare and precious, perhaps, but of the very first water after their kind.

That he took trouble with his gems, taking them up in the rough and polishing each facet patiently the publication of the two posthumous volumes of short stories proves abundantly. I think it proves also the assertion made here that he was by no means a dealer in words. On looking at the first feeble drafts from which so many perfect stories have been fashioned, one discovers that what has been matured, improved, brought to perfection by unwearied endeavour is not the diction of the tale, but the vision of its true shape and detail. Those first attempts are not faltering or uncertain in expression. It is the conception which is at fault. The subjects have not yet been adequately seen. His proceeding was not to group expressive words that mean nothing around misty and mysterious shapes dear to muddled intellects, belonging neither to earth nor to heaven. His vision by a more scrupu-

lous, prolonged and devoted attention to the aspects of the visible world discovered at last the right words as if miraculously impressed for him upon the face of things and events. This was the particular shape taken by his inspiration; it came to him directly, honestly in the light of his day, instead of on the tortuous, dark roads of meditation. His realities came to him from a genuine source, from this universe of vain appearances wherein we men have found everything to make us proud, sorry, exalted, and humble.

Maupassant's renown is universal, but his popularity is restricted. It is not difficult to perceive why. Maupassant is an intensely national writer. He is so intensely national in his logic, in his clearness, in his æsthetic and moral conceptions that he has been accepted by his countrymen without having had to pay the tribute of flattery either to the nation as a whole, or to any class, sphere or division of the nation. The truth of his art tells with an irresistible force; and he stands excused from the duty of patriotic posturing. He is a Frenchman of Frenchmen beyond question or cavil, and with that he is simple enough to be universally comprehensible. What is wanting to his universal success is the mediocrity of an obvious and appealing tenderness. He neglects to qualify his truth with the drop of facile sweetness;

he forgets to strew paper roses over the tombs. The disregard of these common decencies lays him open to the charges of cruelty, cynicism, hardness. And yet it can be safely affirmed that this man wrote from the fulness of a compassionate heart. He is merciless and yet gentle with his mankind; he does not rail at their prudent fears and their small artifices; he does not despise their labours. It seems to me that he looks with an eye of profound pity upon their troubles, deceptions, and misery. But he looks at them all. He sees—and does not turn away his head. As a matter of fact he is courageous.

Courage and justice are not popular virtues. The practice of strict justice is shocking to the multitude who always (perhaps from an obscure sense of guilt) attach to it the meaning of mercy. In the majority of us, who want to be left alone with our illusions, courage inspires a vague alarm. This is what is felt about Maupassant. His qualities, to use the charming and popular phrase, are not lovable. Courage being a force will not masquerade in the robes of affected delicacy and restraint. But if his courage is not of a chivalrous stamp, it cannot be denied that it is never brutal for the sake of effect. The writer of these few reflections, inspired by a long and intimate acquaintance with the work of the man, has been struck by the appreciation of Maupassant

manifested by many women gifted with tenderness and intelligence. Their more delicate and audacious souls are good judges of courage. Their finer penetration has discovered his genuine masculinity without display, his virility without a pose. They have discerned in his faithful dealings with the world that enterprising and fearless temperament, poor in ideas, but rich in power, which appeals most to the feminine mind.

It cannot be denied that he thinks very little. In him extreme energy of perception achieves great results, as in men of action the energy of force and desire. His view of intellectual problems is perhaps more simple than their nature warrants; still a man who has written "Yvette" cannot be accused of want of subtlety. But one cannot insist enough upon this, that his subtlety, his humour, his grimness, though no doubt they are his own, are never presented otherwise but as belonging to our life, as found in nature whose beauties and cruelties alike breathe the spirit of serene unconsciousness.

Maupassant's philosophy of life is more temperamental than rational. He expects nothing either from gods or men. He trusts his senses for information and his instinct for deductions. It may seem that he has made but little use of his mind. But let me be clearly understood. His sensibility is really

very great; and it is impossible to be sensible, unless one thinks vividly, unless one thinks correctly, starting from intelligible premises to an unsophisticated conclusion.

This is literary honesty. It may be remarked that it does not differ very greatly from the ideal honesty of the respectable majority, from the honesty of law-givers, of warriors, of kings, of bricklayers, of all those who express their fundamental sentiment in the ordinary course of their activities, by the work of their hands.

The work of Maupassant's hands is honest. He thinks sufficiently to concrete his fearless conclusions in illuminative instances. He renders them with that exact knowledge of the means and that absolute devotion to the aim of creating a true effect—which is art. He is the most accomplished of narrators.

It is evident that Maupassant looked upon his mankind in another spirit than those writers who make haste to submerge the difficulties of our holding place in the universe under a flood of false and sentimental assumptions. Maupassant was a true and dutiful lover of our earth. He says himself in one of his descriptive passages: "*Nous autres que séduit la terre. . .*" It was true. The earth had for him a compelling charm. He looks upon her august and furrowed face with the fierce insight of real passion. His is the

power of detecting the one immutable quality that matters in the changing aspects of nature and under the ever-shifting surface of life. To say that he could not embrace in his glance all its magnificence and all its misery is only to say that he was human. He lays claim to nothing that his matchless vision has not made his own. This creative artist has the true imagination; he never condescends to invent anything; he sets up no empty pretences. And he stoops to no littleness in his art—least of all to the miserable vanity of a catching phrase.

J. CONRAD.

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YVETTE



CHAPTER I

COMING out of the Café Riche, Jean de Servigny said to Léon Saval: " Shall we walk? It's too fine to drive."

" All right!" replied his friend.

Jean continued: " It's barely eleven; let's take it easy, or we shall get there long before twelve."

A busy crowd was eddying on the boulevard—such a crowd as on summer nights is always to be seen in the streets, stirring, halting, murmuring, flowing along like a river, full of placid gaiety. Here and there a café threw a brilliant shaft of light over groups on the pavement sitting round little tables covered with bottles and glasses, and so closely packed as to completely block the pathway. And in the road, cabs with red, and blue, and green eyes, shooting swiftly across the glare of the lighted front, showed for a second the lean and ambling silhouette of the horse, the profile of the driver up above, the sombre bulk of the vehicle, while the *Urbaine* cabs made pale and fleeting flashes as their yellow panels caught the light.

The two friends strolled slowly along, smok-

ing, in evening dress, with greatcoats over their arms, flowers in their button-holes, and their hats a trifle on one side, as hats are sometimes worn, after a good dinner, when the breeze is warm.

They were old school friends, sincerely, firmly devoted to each other. Jean de Servigny, short, slight, rather bald, frail-looking, but exceedingly elegant, with curled moustache, clear eyes, and sensitive lips, was one of those night-birds who seem born and bred on the boulevards; indefatigable in spite of his look of exhaustion, vigorous in spite of his pallor, one of those wiry Parisians whom gymnastics, fencing, and Turkish baths endow with a nervous, carefully disciplined strength. He was known everywhere for his wild ways, his wit, his wealth, his amours, and for the genial amiability and worldly charm innate in certain men.

A true Parisian, light, sceptical, capricious, impulsive, energetic, irresolute; capable of everything, and yet of nothing; selfish on principle, but generous by fits and starts, getting comfortably through his income, and carefully through his constitution. Cool, yet passionate, he was continually letting himself go and continually pulling himself up, a prey to the most contrary instincts, and yielding to them all, by way of living up to his ideal of the shrewd man of the world, with weather-

cock logic swinging to all the winds, and profiting by every turn, while he never stirs a finger to set it in motion.

His companion, Léon Saval, equally well off, was one of those superb giants who make women turn round and stare after them in the streets. He gave the impression of a statue come to life, a model of the human race, after the fashion of those works of Art that get sent to exhibitions. Too fine, too tall, too broad, and too strong, he sinned by the very extravagance of his good points. He had inspired innumerable passions.

“Have you informed this lady that you’re bringing me?” he asked, as they passed the Vaudeville.

Servigny burst out laughing. “What! inform the Marquise Obardi? Do you inform the driver of an omnibus that you’re going to get up at the next corner?”

“Why! who is she, exactly, then?” asked Saval, rather puzzled.

“A parvenue, a charming rascally adventuress,” replied his friend, “from the devil knows where, who turned up one day in Bohemia, the devil knows how, and has managed to cut a dash there. What does it matter? They say her real name, I mean her maiden name—she’s remained a maiden lady, except in reality of course—is Octavie Bardin; keep the first letter of the Christian, and clip

the last of the surname, and you get Obardi. An attractive person; and with your physique you're bound to be her lover. Hercules isn't introduced to Messalina without something coming of it. I must say one thing, though: the entrance to the place is as free as the entrance to a shop, and you're not in the least obliged to buy what's exhibited. The stock consists of love and cards; they don't bother you to take either the one or the other. And the exit's just as free.

"It's three years since she pitched her shady tent in the Quartier de l'Etoile, and opened its doors to the cosmopolitan scum who come to exploit Paris, to exercise their dangerous talents there.

"I can't for the life of me remember how I came to know her. Suppose I must have gone, like everyone else, because there's gambling, because the women are easy-going, and the men scamps. I can't help being fond of that crowd of decorated rascals—all foreign, all noble, all titled, and all unknown at their Embassies, except, of course, the spies. There they are, trotting out their honour on every imaginable occasion, quoting their ancestors for no reason at all, telling you all about their lives—braggarts, liars and thieves, as dangerous as the cards they play; brave simply because they have to be, like robbers, who can't strip their victims without risking their

own lives. In a word, the aristocracy of the hulks—yes, I'm fond of them. They're interesting to study, amusing to listen to, often witty; never commonplace, like our own blessed officials. Their womenkind, too, are always pretty, with a little flavour of foreign rascality in them, and a sense of mystery about their past lives, spent probably half the time in reformatories. They've almost always got splendid eyes and hair, the true professional physique, a sort of grace that intoxicates and seduces you into making a fool of yourself, and a charm that's altogether unholy and irresistible. They rob you in the real old highway fashion, take everything you have. Ah, yes; they're regular female birds of prey. Well, I'm fond of them too.

“The Marquise Obardi is the very type of these charming villains—full-blown, of course, but still beautiful—the sort of feline sorceress that you feel to be vicious to the very marrow. Oh! it's an amusing house. Gambling, dancing, supper—in fact, all the pleasures of this wicked world.”

“Have you ever been, or are you, her lover?” asked Saval.

Servigny replied: “I haven't been, am not, and never shall be. I go there for the sake of the daughter.”

“Ah! there's a daughter?”

“There is indeed! A miracle, my dear

fellow. She's just at present the principal attraction of the den. A glorious creature, perfection itself, eighteen years old, as fair as her mother is dark; always in high spirits and ready for fun, always laughing and dancing like a mad thing. Who's to be the lucky man? Who *is* the lucky man? No one knows. There are ten of us waiting and hoping. A girl like that in the hands of a woman like the Marquise is a fortune. And they play such a dark game, the rogues! Can't make out what they're at—waiting for a better chance than me, I suppose. Well, I can only tell you—if the chance comes my way, I shall seize her. This girl Yvette nonplusses me completely. She's a mystery. If she isn't the most perfect monster of subtle perversity you ever saw, she's the most marvellous piece of innocence. She lives amongst all these disreputable surroundings with a quiet, triumphant unconcern that's quite amazing in its artfulness or its artlessness. There she is, an exotic offshoot of this adventuress, grown on the dunghill of Bohemia, like a magnificent plant that's nourished on manure—the child, I shouldn't wonder, of some man of rank, some great artist or great lord—a casual prince or king, perhaps—who turned in there one night. Impossible to understand what she is or what her thoughts are. But you'll see for yourself."

Saval began to laugh, and said: "You're in love with her."

"No—I'm in the running; not at all the same thing. I'm going to introduce you to my most serious rivals. But I've got a fair chance—I'm ahead even: she smiles on me."

"You're in love!" repeated Saval.

"No—o! She disturbs and allures me; she makes me uneasy, attracts, and scares me, all at the same time! I distrust her as if she were a trap, and I long for her as I long for a drink when I'm thirsty. I feel the charm of her, but I never go near her without the sort of fear one has of a pickpocket. While I'm with her I've an irrational belief in her innocence—which, mind you, is possible—and a most rational distrust of her villainy, which is just as probable. I feel I'm in contact with an abnormal being, outside the pale of natural law. Which is she, exquisite or abominable? I really can't tell you."

For the third time Saval said: "I tell you you're in love. You're talking of her with the fervour of a poet, and the sing-song of a troubadour. Come, look into yourself, sound your heart, and confess!"

Servigny took several paces without speaking, and then replied: "Well, you may be right after all. Anyway, I'm very much interested in her. Yes—perhaps I *am* in love. I think of her too much. I think of her when I'm going

to sleep, and when I wake up. . . . Yes, it's pretty serious. Her image follows me, actually pursues me, it's always with me, before me, around me, in me. Can you call such a physical obsession love? Her face has gone so deep into my brain that I see her the moment I shut my eyes. My heart leaps each time I catch sight of her. I don't deny it. So be it! I love her; but in a queer sort of way. I want her frightfully, but the idea of making her my wife would seem to me mad, idiotic, monstrous. I'm a little afraid of her too, like a bird with a hawk above it. And I'm jealous, jealous of everything I don't know in that incomprehensible heart. I'm always asking myself: 'Is she simply a charming tomboy, or an abominable jade?' She says things that would make a trooper blush; but—so do parrots. She's sometimes so imprudent, or—impudent, as to make me believe in her spotless innocence, and sometimes so simple, with a kind of impossible simplicity, that it makes me doubt whether she ever was innocent. She provokes and excites me like a courtesan, and defends herself all the time like a vestal. She seems to be fond of me, yet she's always making fun of me; in public she labels herself my mistress, in private she treats me like her brother or her valet. Sometimes I fancy she has as many lovers as her mother; sometimes I think she hasn't a suspicion of

what life really is like—not the smallest suspicion. Then again, she's a tremendous novel-reader—while I'm waiting like this for better days, I keep her supplied with books—she calls me her librarian. By my orders, the New Library sends her weekly every mortal thing that comes out; I believe she reads the lot pell-mell. It must make a strange salad in her head. Perhaps indeed this literary stew counts for something in her extraordinary behaviour. Anyone who looks at life through the medium of fifteen thousand novels must see it in a funny sort of light—get quaint ideas about things, eh?

“ Well, I'm waiting. On the one hand, I've never had for any woman the fancy I have for this one, that's certain—as certain as that I shall never marry her. So, if she's had lovers, I shall swell the number; if not, I shall take number 1, like a tram ticket. It's a simple case. Obviously, she'll never marry. Who'd marry the daughter of the Marquise Obardi, of Octavie Bardin? No one, for a thousand reasons. Where could they find her a husband? In our class? Never. The mother's house is a place of public resort, where the daughter acts as bait. We don't marry into that sort of thing. In the middle classes? Still less. Besides, the marquise is a woman of business; she'll never give Yvette for good and all to anyone but a

man of high position—and him she'll never catch. That leaves the lower classes—still less chance there. No, there's no way out of it. This young lady is not of our class, not of the middle class, not of the people; she can't marry into any of them. She belongs, by reason of her mother, her birth, education, heredity, manners, habits, to—gilded prostitution.

“ She can't escape without turning nun, which is not at all likely, considering her ways and tastes. There's only one profession possible to her: Love. She'll come to it, if she hasn't already. She can't avoid her fate. From a ' young woman ' she'll simply become a ' woman,' and I should much like to be the pivot of the transformation.

“ So I'm waiting—the gentlemen-in-waiting are numerous. You'll see a Frenchman, M. de Belvigne; a Russian, called Prince Kravalow; and an Italian, Chevalier Valréali; these are definite candidates, busy canvassing already. But there are a lot of unconsidered hangers-on. The marquise is watching. I think she's got views about me. She knows I'm very well off, and she's less sure of the others. Her house is really the most astonishing place that I've ever met with of its kind. You even come across very decent fellows there—we're going ourselves, you see, and we shan't be the only ones. As to the women, she's found, or rather, skimmed off the cream of all those

ladies who pillage our purses. Goodness knows where she discovered them. It's apart from the regular professionals, it's not Bohemia, it's not exactly anything. She's had an inspiration of genius, too, in pitching on adventuresses with children, particularly girls. So much so that a greenhorn might fancy he was among good women !"

They had reached the Avenue of the Champs Elysées. A gentle breeze stirred softly among the leaves, touching their faces like soft sighs from a giant fan wafted to and fro somewhere in the sky. Dumb shadows wandered among the trees, or made dusky blurs on the benches. And these shadows spoke very low, as if confiding to each other weighty or shameful secrets.

Servigny resumed: " You've no idea what a collection of fancy titles we shall meet in this menagerie. Talking of that, I shall introduce you as Count Saval. An unadorned Saval would be unpopular—oh ! very unpopular !"

" No ! no ! by Jove !" cried his friend ; " I won't for a moment, even in a place like that, have them suppose me ass enough to deck myself out with a title—no, no !"

Servigny laughed. " Don't be such a duffer," said he ; " they've baptized me the Duke of Servigny—I haven't the least notion how or why. And I remain the Duke of Servigny without a murmur. It really doesn't

hurt, and without it I should be awfully looked down on."

But Saval was by no means open to conviction: "Ah! you've a title of your own, that's quite another thing. But as for me, for better or worse, I'll be the only commoner in the place. It'll be my distinguishing mark—my superiority."

Servigny persisted: "It can't be done, absolutely can't be done. It would seem quite monstrous. You'd be like a rag-picker in an assembly of emperors. Leave it to me; I'll present you as the Viceroy of the Upper Mississippi, nobody'll be astonished. When one's going in for titles, they can't be too big."

"No; once for all, I won't."

"Very well. I was an ass to try and persuade you, for I defy you to get in there without being decorated with a title; there are some shops, you know, where ladies can't get past the door without having a bunch of violets given them."

They turned to the right in the Rue de Berri, ascended to the first floor of a fine modern house, and gave their overcoats and sticks into the hands of four lackeys in breeches. A warm odour of festivity, suggestive of flowers, perfumes, and fair women, and a loud, sustained, confused murmur, issued from the crowded rooms.

A sort of master of the ceremonies, a tall,

upright, stout, and solemn person, whose face was framed in white whiskers, came up to the newcomer, and, with a slight but haughty bow, asked:—

“What name may I announce?”

“Monsieur Saval,” replied Servigny.

At which, opening the door, the man shouted into the crowd of guests:—

“M. le Duc de Servigny.”

“M. le Baron Saval.”

The first room was full of women, and the eye alighted at once on an array of bare necks, emerging from billows of brilliant drapery. The lady of the house, who was standing talking to three friends, turned round and majestically came forward with graceful movements, and smiling lips.

Her forehead, narrow and very low, was covered with a mass of shining black hair, thick as fleece, encroaching a little on the temples. She was tall and rather too plump and full-blown, but very beautiful, with a heavy, warm, compelling beauty. Her helmet of black hair had the power of conjuring up delightful visions, of making her mysteriously desirable; beneath it were great black eyes. The nose was rather small, the mouth large, yet infinitely seductive, eloquent of love and conquest.

But her most living charm was in her voice. It came from that mouth like water from a

spring, so natural, so soft, so true in tone, so clear, that it was a physical joy to listen to it, a delight for the ear to hear the subtle words flowing out like a stream from its source, a delight for the eye to see those beautiful lips part to give them passage.

She stretched out a hand to Servigny, who kissed it, and, letting her fan drop to the full length of its thin gold chain, she gave the other to Saval, and said:—

“ Welcome, Baron; any friend of the Duke is welcome here.”

And she fixed her glowing eyes on the giant presented to her. There was a tiny black down on her upper lip, the suspicion of a moustache, more visible when she spoke; a delicious scent clung about her, strong and intoxicating—some American or Indian perfume. But fresh people kept arriving, marquises, counts, or princes; and saying to Servigny with motherly graciousness: “ You’ll find my daughter in the other room—make yourselves at home, gentlemen, the house is yours,” she left them, to meet her new guests, casting at Saval that smiling, fleeting glance by which a woman shows a man that he has pleased her.

Servigny seized his friend’s arm: “ Come on,” said he, “ I’ll pilot you. This room belongs to the ladies—temple of the Flesh, fresh or otherwise. Bargains as good as new, and

better still, high-priced articles to be had cheap. To the left is the gambling room—temple of Gold. You know all about that. . . . In the room at the far end, they dance—temple of Innocence, the sanctuary, the maiden's market. It's there that these ladies show off their produce. Why, even real marriages would be tolerated. Yes, over there is the Future, the hope of our days and nights. And really, the most curious feature in this museum of moral maladies is the sight of these young girls, with souls as out of joint as the bodies of little clowns born of acrobats. Let's go and have a look at them."

He kept bowing courteously to right and left, distributing his compliments, and glancing rapidly with the eye of a connoisseur at every bare-necked woman that he knew.

A band at the far end of the second room was playing a waltz; and they stopped in the doorway to watch. Some fifteen couples were dancing; the men solemn, the girls with a smile fixed on their lips. Like their mothers they showed a good deal of skin, and the bodices of one or two were merely secured by a narrow ribbon over the shoulders.

Suddenly from the very end of the room darted a tall girl, rushing along past everyone, pushing the dancers aside, and holding up the outrageously long train of her dress in her left hand. She ran with quick

little steps, as women do in a crowd, and cried:

“ Ah ! here’s Muscade ! How *are* you, Muscade ? ”

Her face was like the Spring, alight with happiness. Her warm white skin, the skin that goes with auburn hair, seemed to sparkle. And that mass of hair, twisted round her head, flame-bright, hung heavy on her forehead, and looked too weighty for her supple and still slender neck. She seemed made for motion, as her mother was made for speech, so natural, noble and simple were her gestures. To see her walk, turn, bend her head, lift her arm, was to feel a moral joy, a physical delight. She repeated:—

“ Ah, Muscade, how are you, Muscade ? ”

Servigny shook her hand violently, as he would have shaken a man’s, and said:—

“ Mam’zelle Yvette, this is my friend, Baron Saval.”

She bowed, and staring at the stranger, said: “ How do you do, Monsieur ; are you always as big as that ? ”

In the chaffing tone that he adopted with her to hide his distrust and uncertainty, Servigny replied: “ No, Mam’zelle. He’s brought his largest dimensions to-night to please your mother ; she’s fond of the gigantic.”

The young girl answered in a serio-comic voice: “ All right ! But when you come for

me, make yourself a little smaller, please; I like moderation. Muscade, now, is just my size."

She gave the newcomer her little, wide-open hand, and said: "Are you going to dance, Muscade? Come along, do let's have a turn!"

Without answering, Servigny, with a quick, eager movement, clasped her round the waist, and they disappeared at once with the fury of a whirlwind.

They danced faster than all the others, turning and turning, flying along, whirling round and round; clasped so close that they looked like one, with bodies upright and legs almost still, as if an invisible machine hidden under their feet had made them so to twirl. They seemed tireless. The other couples stopped one by one. They alone remained, waltzing unendingly. They had a look of being far away from the dance, in ecstasy. And the band played on, their eyes fixed on this treadmill couple; every eye was fixed on them, and when they stopped at last, everyone applauded.

She was a little flushed now, with strange-looking eyes, ardent, yet timid, less frank than before; troubled, and so blue, with such black pupils, that they seemed quite unnatural.

Servigny was like a drunken man. He leaned against a door to recover himself.

“ No head, my poor Muscade !” she said ;
“ I’m tougher than you !”

He laughed nervously, devouring her with greedy longing in his eyes and in the curve of his lip ; he continued to gaze at her standing before him with her bare throat heaving tumultuously.

“ Sometimes,” she went on, “ you look just like a cat that’s going to fly at someone. Come along ; give me your arm, and let’s go and find your friend.”

Without a word he offered his arm, and they crossed the room. Saval was no longer alone. The Marquise Obardi had rejoined him. She was murmuring trivial common-places in that entrancing voice of hers. And looking deep into his eyes, she seemed to be meaning quite other words than those her lips pronounced. The moment she saw Servigny her face became smiling, and, turning towards him, she said : “ My dear Duke, did you know that I’ve just taken a villa at Bougival for two months ? You must come and see me, and bring your friend. Let’s see, I’m going in on Monday — will you both come and dine next Saturday, and stay all Sunday ?”

Servigny abruptly turned his head towards Yvette. She was smiling, tranquil and serene, and said with an assurance that left no loophole for hesitation : “ Of course Muscade will

come to dinner on Saturday! You needn't take the trouble to ask him. We'll have tremendous fun in the country."

He fancied he could detect the birth of a promise in her smile, some hidden intention in her voice.

The Marquise lifted her great dark eyes to Saval: "And you, Baron?" she said; and *her* smile, at any rate, was not ambiguous.

He bowed: "I shall be only too happy, Madame!"

"Ah!" said Yvette slyly, "we'll scandalise everyone down there, won't we, Muscade? We'll make my regiment mad with rage?"

There was again that artless or artful meaning in her voice, and with a glance she pointed to a group of men, watching them from a distance.

"As much as ever you like, Mam'zelle," replied Servigny. In talking to her he never said *Mademoiselle*, by virtue of a sort of comradeship established between them.

"Why does *Mademoiselle* Yvette always call my friend Servigny 'Muscade'?" asked Saval.

The young girl put on an innocent expression: "Because he's always slipping through one's fingers, Monsieur. You think you've got hold of him, but you never have."

The Marquise, who was visibly occupied with other thoughts and had not taken her

eyes off Saval, said absently: "Aren't these children funny?"

"I'm not funny," answered Yvette crossly, "I'm simply frank! I like Muscade, and he's always deserting me; it's so annoying!"

Servigny made a deep bow: "I'll never leave you again, Mam'zelle, day or night!"

She made a movement of alarm: "Ah, no! The day's all very well, but at night you'd be a mistake."

"Why, how?" he asked wickedly.

She answered with calm audacity: "Because I'm sure you can't look so nice in *déshabille*."

The Marquise, without appearing in the least disturbed, cried out: "Why! they're saying the most awful things! One can't be as innocent as all that."

Servigny replied chaffingly: "That's just what I think, Marquise!"

Yvette fixed her eyes on him: "You—" she said haughtily in a wounded voice; "you've made a hole in your manners: you've been doing that too often lately."

And, turning her back on him, she called out: "Chevalier, come and defend me, I'm being insulted."

There came up a lean, dark man, slow of movement, who said with a forced smile: "Which is the culprit?"

She nodded her head towards Servigny.

“ He ! ” she said ; “ but all the same, I like him better than the rest of you put together ; he’s less tiresome.”

Chevalier Valréali bowed : “ We do what we can,” said he ; “ we’ve fewer attractions perhaps, but not less devotion.”

At this moment a tall, corpulent man, with grey whiskers, approached, and said in a big voice : “ Mademoiselle Yvette—your servant.”

“ Ah ! Monsieur de Belvigne.” she cried, and turning to Saval, remarked : “ This is my best young man ; tall, fat, rich, and stupid. That’s how I like them. A real knight—of the trencher. Why ! you’re even taller than he ! I *must* give you a nickname. Good ! I shall call you ‘ young Mr. Rhodes,’ after the Colossus—he must have been your father. But I’m certain you two have any amount of interesting things to tell each other up there over our heads—so good-night ! ” And off she went towards the band, to ask the musicians to play a quadrille.

Mme. Obardi, who seemed lost in reverie, turned slowly to Servigny : “ You’re always teasing her. You’ll spoil her temper, and give her all sorts of bad habits ” ; but it was clearly said for the sake of talking.

“ Ah ! then you’ve not finished her education ? ” he retorted.

She looked as if she did not understand, and went on benignly smiling.

Just then she saw approaching a solemn personage, starred with crosses, and hastening towards him, cried: "Ah! Prince, how delightful!"

Servigny again took Saval's arm, and drew him away, "That's the latest suitor, Prince Kravalow," he said. "Well now, isn't she superb?"

Saval replied: "I call them both superb. The mother's good enough for me."

Servigny bowed: "She's quite at your service, my dear chap," he said. The dancers elbowed them, taking their places for the quadrille, couple by couple, in two opposing lines.

"Let's go and see the Greeks," said Servigny, and they made their way into the gambling room.

Round each table stood a circle of men watching, who spoke but seldom, while the chink from the gold thrown on the cloth, or sharply raked in, mingled its light, metallic murmur with the murmur of the players, as though the voice of money were making itself heard among the voices of human beings.

These men were all decorated with strange orders, and curious sorts of ribbons; and though their faces were so different, they all had the same severe expression, and were most readily distinguished one from the other by the cut of their beards. The stark Ameri-

can with a horseshoe round his jaw, the haughty Englishman with a hairy fan divided on his chest, the Spaniard with a fleece of black up to the eyes, the Roman with the huge moustache presented to Italy by Victor Emanuel, the Austrian with his whiskers and clean-shaven chin, a Russian general with an upper lip armed, as it were, with two lances of waxed hair, and the Frenchman with his gay moustache—revealed the fantasies of all the barbers in the world.

“Aren't you going to play?” asked Servigny.

“No, are you?”

“Never here! If you're ready, we'll be off, and come again some quieter evening. It's too crowded to-night, one can't stir.”

“All right.”

They disappeared through a curtained doorway which led to the vestibule.

As soon as they were in the street, Servigny said: “Well, what do you think of it?”

“Oh! interesting enough! But I prefer the women's quarters to the men's.”

“Rather! Those women are our very finest specimens. One scents love in them as one scents perfumes at a hairdresser's. This is really the only kind of house where you get your money's worth. Ah! and what craftswomen, my dear chap! What artists! . . . Have you ever eaten tarts at a baker's?”

They look good, but they're good-for-nothing. The man who made them is a fellow who only knows how to make bread. Well, the love of an ordinary woman of the world always seems to me like baker's pastry. Whereas, the love that one gets at these Marquise Obardis, well—it's the real thing. Ah! they know how to make cakes, those little confectioners! One pays 2½d. for what costs a penny anywhere else, that's all!"

"Who's the lord of the manor just now?" asked Saval.

Servigny shrugged his shoulders. "I know nothing about it," said he; "the last I heard of was an English peer, who departed three months ago. Just now she must be living on the community, perhaps on the gambling, for she's capricious. But we've settled to dine with her at Bougival next Saturday, haven't we? In the country one has more opportunity; I shall find out at last what Yvette has in that head of hers!"

"There's nothing I should like better. I've no engagements that day," replied Saval.

Returning through the Champs Elysées, under the fiery field of the stars, they disturbed a couple on a bench, and Servigny muttered: "Love! How idiotic, and yet how tremendous it is! How commonplace, and yet how amusing! It's always the same, and always different. And the ragamuffin who pays that

girl a franc asks of her the very same thing for which I should pay ten thousand to some Obardi, no younger or less stupid perhaps than that drab. What folly !”

He said nothing for some minutes, then began again: “ It would be rare luck all the same to be Yvette’s first lover. Ah ! for that I’d give—I’d give——”

He did not discover what he would give. And Saval wished him good-night at the corner of the Rue Royale.

CHAPTER II

THE dinner table had been laid on the verandah overlooking the river. The Villa Printemps, taken by the Marquise Obardi, was placed half-way up the slope, just where, below the garden wall, the Seine made a curve in the direction of Marly.

Opposite the house loomed the island of Croissy, a mass of great trees and foliage, and a long reach of the broad river was visible, stretching as far as the floating café of *La Grenouillère*, hidden amongst the green.

The evening was falling, a calm, river-side evening, full of sweetness and colour, one of those quiet evenings that bring with them a sense of happiness. Not a breath stirred the leaves, no puff of wind ruffled the smooth, pale surface of the Seine. It was not too hot; just pleasantly warm—good to be alive. The benign sweetness of the river banks mounted towards the quiet sky.

The sun was going down behind the trees, on its way to other lands, and one seemed to inhale the peace of the sleeping earth, inhale the unheeding breath of life itself, in that calm, broad space.

When the party came out from the drawing-room to sit down to dinner, they were all in ecstasies. A tender gaiety invaded their hearts; it seemed so delicious to be dining out there in the open, breathing the clear sweet-scented air, with the great river and the sunset for background.

The Marquise had taken Saval's arm, and Yvette Servigny's. There were only the four of them. The two women seemed quite unlike what they had been in Paris, particularly Yvette; she hardly spoke, and appeared languid and grave.

Saval had difficulty in recognizing her: "What's the matter, Mademoiselle?" he asked; "you're utterly changed since the other day. You've become quite a reasonable being!"

"It's the country," she replied; "I *am* changed. I feel quite strange. But then, you know, I never do feel the same for two days running. One day I'm full of mischief and the next I'm like a funeral. I change like the weather, I can't think why. You see, I have all sorts of moods. Some days I could really kill people—not animals, I could never kill an animal—but people I could, and at other times I could cry for nothing at all. I get so many different ideas into my head. It depends a good deal on how you get up in the morning. When I wake, I could tell

you what I'm going to be like all day. Perhaps it's one's dreams that make one like that; or perhaps the book one's just been reading has something to do with it."

She had on a dress of white flannel, falling about her in soft, delicate folds. The loose bodice, with big pleats, set off, without too much defining, her firm, free, well-formed figure. Her slender throat rose out of a foam of heavy lace, and, whiter than her dress, curved softly, a miracle of beauty, beneath the heavy burden of her red-gold hair.

Servigny looked at her fixedly. "Yes," he said, "you're adorable this evening, Mam'zelle. I should like to see you always like this."

With a touch of her usual mischief she answered: "Don't offer me your heart, Muscade; I might take it seriously to-day, and that would cost you dear!"

The Marquise looked supremely happy. She was dressed in a dignified and simple robe of black, which showed the statuesque lines of her fine figure; there was a touch of red in the bodice, a garland of red carnations falling from the waist like a chain, looped up on the hip, and a red rose in her dark hair. In that simple toilette with the sanguine flowers, in those eyes with their compelling gaze, in that slow speech and infrequent gesture, her whole personality gave the idea of hidden flame.

Saval, too, seemed serious and absorbed. He now and then caressed his brown beard—pointed *à la Henri III.*—with a gesture habitual to him, and appeared to be lost in thought. For several minutes no one spoke.

Then, while some trout were being served, Servigny remarked: "Silence is a fine thing sometimes. It can often make a closer link between two people than speech—don't you think so, Marquise?"

Turning a little towards him, she replied: "You are right. It's so beautiful to be thinking at the same moment about the same delightful things."

She rested her ardent glance on Saval; and for some seconds they remained so, gazing into each other's eyes. A tiny movement, almost imperceptible, occurred beneath the table.

Servigny began again: "Mam'zelle Yvette, you'll make me think you're in love if you keep on being as good as this. Now, with whom could you be in love? Let's see; shall we run through them together? I'll leave out the rank and file, and only take the chiefs. Is it Prince Kravalow?"

At this name Yvette roused herself. "My poor Muscade, what are you thinking of? Why, the prince looks like a waxwork Russian who's taken a prize in a hairdresser's competition."

"Good! Off with the prince! Then you

must have favoured the Vicomte Pierre de Belvigne ?”

This time she burst out laughing: “ Ha, ha, ha ! Can't you see me hanging round Raisiné's neck ” (she called him indifferently Raisiné, Malvoisie, Argenteuil, for she nick-named everyone), “ murmuring in his ear: ‘ Dear little Pierre, my divine Pedro, my adored Pietri, my darling little Pierrot, put down your dear, fat, ducky head for your own little wife to kiss ’ ?”

Servigny proclaimed: “ Off with those two ! That leaves the marquise's favourite—Chevalier Valréali !”

Yvette recovered all her gaiety: “ Watery eyes ? I'm sure he's a professional weeper at the Madeleine, hired out for first-class funeral processions. I always fancy I'm dead every time he looks at me.”

“ Three gone ! Well, then, you're smitten with the Baron Saval, here present ?”

“ With young Mr. Rhodes ? No, there's too much of him. I should feel as if I were in love with the Arc de Triomphe !”

“ Then, Mam'zelle, you must be in love with me—I'm the only one of your adorers we haven't mentioned. I kept myself in the background in my modesty and prudence. It only remains for me to thank you.”

In an ecstasy of mirth she replied: “ You, Muscade ? No-o. I like you very much—

but I don't love you. Wait a moment, though—I don't want to discourage you. I don't love you—yet. You've got a chance—perhaps. Persevere, Muscade; be devoted, eager, humble, full of attentions and forethought, submissive to my smallest caprice, ready to do everything to please me—and, we'll see—later on."

"But, Mam'zelle, I'd rather exhibit all those qualities after, than before, if you don't mind."

She asked with a soubrette-like air of innocence: "After what, Muscade?"

"Why! after you've shown that you love me!"

"Well, *pretend* that I love you; believe it if you like——!"

"But——"

"Be quiet, Muscade, that's enough."

He gave her a military salute and held his tongue.

The sun had hidden itself behind the island, but the whole sky remained flaming like a brazier, and the still water of the river seemed turned to blood. Houses, things, people, all were reddened by the glow of the sunset. The crimson rose in the marquise's hair looked like a drop of carmine fallen from the clouds on to her head.

Choosing a moment when Yvette's eyes were far away, her mother, as though by accident, laid her hand upon Saval's. The young

girl stirred, and the marquise's hand flew lightly back to adjust something in the folds of her bodice.

Servigny, who was watching them, said: "Shall we take a turn on the island after dinner, Mam'zelle?"

She was charmed with this idea: "Yes, yes! That will be lovely; we'll go all alone, won't we, Muscade?"

"Yes, all alone, Mam'zelle."

And silence fell on them again.

The broad stillness of the horizon, the sleepy quiet of the evening stole over their hearts, and bodies, and voices. There are tranquil, precious hours, when it is well-nigh impossible to speak. Noiselessly the lackeys served the dinner. The blaze in the sky died down, and the slow-falling night marshalled its shadows over the earth.

"Are you going to make a long stay?" asked Saval.

"Yes," replied the marquise, dwelling on each word; "just so long as I am happy here."

When the light failed, lamps were brought, and cast on the table a weird, pale light amid the vast, indefinite darkness; and instantly a rain of flies began falling on the cloth—tiny flies, which burnt themselves passing over the lamp chimneys, and with scorched legs and wings powdered the damask, the plates, the glasses, with a sort of grey, dancing dust.

The diners swallowed them in their wine, ate them in the sauces, saw them struggling about the bread, and all the time their faces and hands were tickled by this countless flying swarm of tiny beasts.

The wine had constantly to be thrown away, the plates covered, the courses eaten furtively, with infinite precautions. This game amused Yvette, Servigny taking care to shelter all she put to her lips, to guard her wine-glass, and hold over her head, like a roof, his outspread napkin. But the marquise, a little nauseated, began to show signs of upset nerves, and the dinner came quickly to an end.

Yvette had by no means forgotten Servigny's proposition: "Now we're going to the island, aren't we?" she said to him.

"Be sure not to stay long," advised her mother languidly. "We are coming with you as far as the ferry."

They started along the towing-path, two by two, the young girl and her friend in front. Behind, they could hear the marquise and Saval talking very low and very quick. All was black, velvet black, as black as ink; but the sky, swarming with grains of fire, seemed to be sowing them in the river, for the dark water was powdered with stars. The frogs were croaking now, raising all along the banks their rolling, monotonous chant; and in-

numerable nightingales flung their soft song into the calm air.

All of a sudden Yvette said: "Why! they're not following! Where are they?" And she called out: "Mother!"

No voice replied. The young girl continued: "They can't be far off, at any rate; I heard them just now."

"They may have turned back," murmured Servigny. "Perhaps your mother was cold." He drew her along.

In front of them glowed a light. It came from the inn of Martinet, fisherman and vendor of refreshments. At the call of the strollers a man came out of the house; they embarked in a broad punt moored in the middle of the reeds at the water's edge. The ferryman took his oars, and the advance of the heavy boat awoke the stars sleeping on the water, making them dance a frenzied dance, which little by little came to rest again behind them.

They touched the other bank, and stepped out under the great trees. The freshness of damp earth floated there, below those high, clustering branches, which seemed to harbour as many nightingales as leaves. A distant piano began playing a popular waltz.

Servigny had taken Yvette's arm, and very quietly he slipped his hand round her waist and pressed it gently. "What are you thinking of?" he said.

“ Nothing ! I’m just happy.”

“ So you don’t care for me at all, then ?”

“ Of course I care for you, Muscade ; I care a great deal ; but do drop all that now ! It’s too beautiful here to listen to your nonsense !”

He pressed her against him, for all she tried with little jerks to get free, and through the soft texture of her flannel dress he could feel the warmth of her body.

“ Yvette !” he stammered.

“ Well, what ?”

“ I care for *you*.”

“ You’re not in earnest, Muscade ?”

“ I am ; I’ve cared for you a long time.”

She was trying all the time to get away from him, trying to pull away her arm, crushed between them. And they walked with difficulty, hindered by this link and by their struggles, zigzagging like a couple of drunkards.

He knew not what to say to her next, feeling it was impossible to speak to a young girl as he would have spoken to a woman ; in his perplexity he kept seeking for the right thing to do, wondering whether she consented or simply did not understand—ransacking his brain for just the right, tender, irrevocable words.

He kept on saying : “ Yvette ! .No—but—Yvette !”

Then, suddenly, he hazarded a flying kiss upon her cheek.

She swerved a little, and said in a vexed voice: "Oh! how silly you are! Why can't you leave me alone?"

The tone of her voice told nothing of what she was feeling or wishing; but, judging that she was not so very angry, he put his lips to the nape of her neck, close to the lowest-growing golden down of her hair, that fascinating spot he had coveted so long.

Then she struggled hard to escape, with jerks and starts. But he held her tight, and throwing his other hand upon her shoulder, forced her face round to his own, and stole from her lips a maddening, long kiss.

She slipped down through his arms with a quick undulation of her whole body, dived, and freeing herself swiftly from his embrace, disappeared in the darkness with a great rustling of skirts, like the noise of a bird taking flight.

He stood for a moment quite still, astounded by her suppleness and her disappearance, but, hearing no further sound, he called softly: "Yvette!" There was no answer. He started walking, probing the darkness with his gaze, searching the bushes for the white blur that her dress must surely make. It was all dark. Again he cried, and louder: "Mam'zelle Yvette!"

The nightingales stopped singing.

He hastened on, vaguely alarmed, calling louder and louder: "Mam'zelle Yvette! Mam'zelle Yvette!"

Nothing! He stopped and listened. The whole island was still—scarcely a shiver among the leaves above his head. Alone, the frogs continued their sonorous croaking on the banks.

Then he proceeded to range from copse to copse, descending to the steep, bushy bank of the main stream, and returning to the bare, flat bank of the backwater. He went on till he found himself opposite Bougival, came back to *La Grenouillère*, searched in all the thickets, crying continually: "Mam'zelle Yvette! Where are you? Do answer! It was only a joke! I say, do answer! Don't keep me hunting for you like this!"

A distant clock began to strike. He counted the strokes: Midnight! He had been patrolling the island for two hours. Then he thought that perhaps she had gone home, and he returned also, very uneasy, making the round by the bridge.

A servant, asleep in an armchair, was waiting up in the hall. Servigny woke him and asked: "Has Mlle. Yvette been in long? I was obliged to leave her over there, to pay a call."

The man replied: "Oh yes, M. le Duc, Mlle. came in before ten o'clock."

He reached his room and went to bed, but his eyes remained wide open, he was unable to sleep. That stolen kiss had disturbed him, and he mused: What was she meaning? What was she thinking? What did she know? How pretty she was, how maddening!

His senses, jaded by the life he led, by all the women he had known, all the loves he had exploited, awoke before this strange child, so fresh, so exciting, so inexplicable.

He heard the clock strike one, then two. Assuredly he would never get to sleep! He was hot, perspiring, the blood pulsing hard in his temples; he got up and opened the window.

A puff of fresh air came in, and he drew in a long, deep breath of it. The night was silent, densely dark, unmoving. But suddenly he perceived before him, in the depths of the garden, a glowing speck, like a little live coal. "Hallo!" he thought; "a cigar! That must be Saval"; and he called out softly: "Léon!"

A voice replied: "Is that you, Jean?"

"Yes; wait for me, I'm coming down."

He dressed, went out, and joined his friend, who was smoking, astride of an iron garden-chair.

"What are you up to at this time of night?"

"I? Resting!" replied Saval, with a laugh.

Servigny pressed his hand: "My compliments, my dear fellow. And I—am not."

"That's to say?"

“ That’s to say that Yvette and her mother are not alike.”

“ What’s happened ? Tell me !”

Servigny recounted his efforts, and their failure. “ This child beats me altogether,” he went on; “ just think—I haven’t been able to get to sleep. What an odd thing a young girl is ! She looks simplicity itself, but one really knows nothing about her. A woman who has lived, and loved, and knows what life is, one sees into at once. When it’s a question of a young girl, on the contrary, one can’t deduce anything at all. At the bottom of my heart, I begin to think she’s making a fool of me.”

Saval tilted his chair, and said very slowly : “ Take care, my dear fellow, she’s leading you towards marriage. Remember all the illustrious examples. By that same process Mlle. de Montijo, who was at any rate well-born, became an empress. Don’t play at being Napoleon !”

“ Don’t be afraid of that !” murmured Servigny ; “ I’m neither a fool nor an emperor, and you must be one or the other to do anything so mad. But, I say, are you sleepy ?”

“ No, not a bit !”

“ Then let’s go for a stroll along the river !”

“ All right !”

They opened the gate, and started along the river-side towards Marly. It was the

chill hour that precedes the dawn, the hour of deepest sleep, of deepest rest, of profound quiet. Even the vague noises of the night were hushed. Nightingales no longer sang; frogs had ceased their uproar; alone, some unknown creature, a bird, perhaps, was making somewhere a sound as of a grating saw, feeble, monotonous, and regular, like something mechanical at work.

Servigny, who had his moments of poetry as well as of philosophy, said all of a sudden: "Look here! This girl is too much for me. In arithmetic, one and one make two. In love, one and one ought to make one, but they make two for all that. Have you ever felt this longing to absorb a woman into yourself, or to be absorbed in her? I'm not speaking of the animal instinct, but of that moral, mental torment to be at one with her, to open all one's heart and soul to her, to penetrate to the very depths of her thought. And yet one never really knows her, never fathoms all the ups and downs of her will, her wishes, her opinions; never unravels even a little the mystery of that soul so near you, the soul behind those eyes that look at you, as clear as water, as transparent as if there were nothing hidden behind; the soul speaking to you through lips you love so that they seem to be your very own; the soul which utters its thoughts to you, one by one in words, and

yet remains further from you than those stars are from each other, and more inscrutable. Odd, isn't it?"

Saval replied: "I don't ask so much from them. I don't look past their eyes. I don't bother myself much about the inside, but a good deal about the out."

"The fact is," murmured Servigny, "that Yvette is abnormal. I wonder how she'll greet me this morning!"

Just as they reached Marly they noticed that the sky was growing lighter; cocks were beginning to crow in the poultry-houses, and the sound came to them deadened by the thickness of the walls. A bird chirped in an enclosure on the left, repeating ceaselessly a simple, comic little flourish.

"It's about time we went home," remarked Saval.

They returned. And Servigny, entering his room, noticed the horizon all rosy through the still open window. He closed the shutter, drew and pulled together the thick curtains, went to bed, and at last fell asleep. He dreamed of Yvette all through his slumbers. A singular noise awoke him. He sat up in bed, listened, and heard nothing. Then suddenly, against his shutters came a curious crackling like falling hail.

He jumped out of bed, ran to the window, threw it open and saw Yvette standing in the

garden path, flinging great handfuls of gravel up into his face.

She was dressed in pink, with a large, broad-brimmed straw hat trimmed with one cavalier plume, and laughing a sly, malicious laugh, she cried: "Well, Muscade! are you still asleep? What *can* you have been doing last night to wake up so late? Did you meet with an adventure, my poor Muscade?"

He was dazzled by the brilliant daylight suddenly striking on eyes still heavy with fatigue, and surprised at the young girl's mocking serenity.

"Coming, coming, Mam'zelle!" he called back; "just a second to dip my head in water, and I'll be down."

"Well, be quick," she cried; "it's ten o'clock. And I've a splendid plan to tell you about; a conspiracy we're going to carry out. Breakfast's at eleven, you know."

He found her sitting on a bench, with a book on her knees. She took his arm with a friendly familiarity, as frank and gay as if nothing had happened the night before, and drawing him away to the end of the garden, said: "Now, this is my plan. We're just going to disobey mother, and you're going to take me to *La Grenouillère*. I want to see it. Mother says that decent women can't go there. But I don't care whether they can or can't. You will take me, won't you, Muscade?"

We'll have such fun with all those boating people !”

There was a sweet scent about her, and he could not determine what that vague and delicate aroma was. It was not one of her mother's heavy perfumes, but a subtle fragrance in which he seemed to catch a suspicion of iris powder, and possibly a touch of ver-bena.

Whence came that undefinable scent ? From her dress, her hair, her skin ? He wondered, and as she spoke quite close to him, her fresh breath came full in his face, and that too seemed delicious to inhale. Then he fancied that this fleeting perfume, so impossible to put a name to, was perhaps conjured up by his fascinated senses—nothing but a sort of delusive emanation of her young, seductive grace.

“ That's settled, then, Muscade ?” she said. “ It will be very hot after breakfast, and mother's sure not to wish to go out. She's always so limp when it's hot. We'll leave her with your friend, and you shall take me. We shall be supposed to be going into the wood. Oh, if you only knew how much I want to see *La Grenouillère* !”

They came to the gate opposite the river. A ray of sunlight fell on the slumberous, glistening stream. A light heat mist was rising, the fume of evaporated water, which

lay on the surface of the river in a thin, shining vapour. Now and then a boat would pass, a rapid yawl, or clumsy wherry, and they heard in the distance short or prolonged whistles, of trains pouring the Sunday crowd from Paris into the surrounding country, and of steam-boats giving warning of their approach to the lock at Marly.

But a little bell rang, announcing breakfast, and they went in. The meal was a silent one, almost. A heavy July noon crushed the Earth, weighed down all her creatures. The heat seemed nearly solid, paralyzing to body and spirit. Torpid words refused to leave the lips, and movement was laborious, as if the air had acquired the power of resistance, and become a difficult medium. Yvette alone, though silent, seemed brisk and nervously impatient. When dessert was over she said: "Now, shall we go for a walk in the wood? It would be so jolly under the trees!"

The marquise, who seemed quite done up, murmured: "Are you mad? As if one could go out in such a heat!"

Delighted, the young girl went on: "All right, then! We'll leave the baron to keep you company. Muscade and I are going to climb the hill and sit on the grass and read!"

She turned towards Servigny: "Well, is that settled?" she said.

"At your service, Mam'zelle," he replied.

She flew off to get her hat.

The marquise shrugged her shoulders :

“ She’s mad, really,” she sighed. Then, with languid fatigue in the slow, amorous gesture, she stretched her fine, white hand to the baron, who kissed it solemnly.

Yvette and Servigny started. Following the river at first, they crossed the bridge, went on to the island, and sat themselves down on the bank of the main stream under the willows, for it was still too early to go to *Grenouillère*.

The young girl at once drew a book from her pocket and said with a laugh: “ Now, Muscade, you’re going to read to me !”

She held the book out to him.

He made a gesture towards flight. “ I, Mam’zelle ? But I don’t know how to read !”

She went on gravely: “ Come, now, no excuses, no explanations ! There you are again, you see—a fine sort of suitor ! ‘ Everything for nothing,’ that’s your motto, isn’t it ?”

He took the book, opened it, and was amazed. It was a treatise on entomology—a history of the ant, by an English writer. And he remained silent under the impression that she was chaffing, till at last she grew impatient, and said: “ Come, begin !”

“ Is this for a bet, or is it simply a whim ?”

“ No, my dear sir, I saw that book at a

book-shop. They told me it was the best thing written on ants; I thought it would be amusing to learn about the life of the little beasts, and watch them running about in the grass at the same time; so now, begin!"

She stretched herself out on her face, her eyes fixed on the grass, and he began reading: "Without doubt the anthropoid apes are, of all animals, those which most nearly approach to man in their anatomical structure; but if we consider the habits of ants, their organization into societies, their immense communities, their dwellings, the roads they construct, their custom of keeping domestic animals, and sometimes even of having slaves, we are forced to admit that they have the right to claim a place near to man on the ladder of intelligence. . . ." And he went on in a monotonous voice, stopping now and then to ask: "Isn't that enough?"

She shook her head, and having caught a wandering ant on the point of a blade of grass she had plucked, was amusing herself by making it run from end to end of the stalk, which she turned the moment the creature had reached one extremity. She listened with a quiet, concentrated attention to all the surprising details in the life of these frail creatures, their subterranean works, their habit of rearing, stabling, and feeding greenfly, so as to obtain the sugary liquor secreted

by them, just as we ourselves keep cows in stables; their customs of domesticating little blind insects to keep their establishments clean, and of going to war and bringing back slaves to take such care of the conquerors that the latter even lose the habit of feeding themselves.

And gradually, as though a motherly tenderness had awakened in her heart for this beastie, so minute and so intelligent, Yvette made the ant climb up her finger, and looked at it with soft eyes, quite longing to kiss it. And as Servigny read of how they live in a commonwealth, how they have sports and friendly trials of strength and skill, the young girl in her enthusiasm actually attempted to kiss the insect, which escaped from her finger and ran about her face. Whereupon she gave as piercing a scream as if she had been threatened by some terrible danger, and, with the wildest gestures, brushed at her cheek to get rid of the creature. Servigny, in fits of laughter, caught it on her forehead, and planted a long kiss on the spot he had taken it from, without her turning away her face.

Then, rising, she declared: "I like that better than a novel. Now let's go to *La Grenouillère*."

They came to a part of the island planted like a park with huge, shady trees. Along the river, where boats kept gliding by, some

couples were strolling under the branches; work-girls and their lovers, who slouched along in their shirt-sleeves, with a dissipated, jaded air, tall hats on the back of their heads, and coats over their arms; citizens, too, and their families, the women in their Sunday clothes, the children trotting around their parents like broods of chickens.

A distant, continuous hubbub of human voices, a dull and muttering clamour, proclaimed the favourite spot of the river crowd. They came in sight of it all of a sudden—a huge barge crowned with a roof, moored to the bank, and crowded with males and females, some seated drinking at little tables, others on their feet, shouting, singing, howling, dancing, capering, to the sound of a wheezy piano all out of tune and as vibrant as an old kettle.

Great red-haired girls, displaying all the curves of their opulent figures, were promenading round, three parts drunk, with provocation in their eyes and obscenities on their crimson lips. Others danced wildly in front of young men dressed in rowing shorts, cotton vests, and jockey caps. And the whole place exhaled an odour of heat and violet powder, of perfumery and perspiration.

Those seated at the tables were gulping down white, and red, and yellow, and green drinks; shouting and yelling all the time,

yielding apparently to a violent longing to make a noise, an animal desire to fill their ears and brains with uproar.

Every minute or so, a swimmer, standing erect on the roof, would spring into the water, showering splashes on those at the nearest tables, who yelled at him like savages.

On the river a fleet of boats kept passing. Long slender, gliding skiffs, lifted along by the strokes of oarsmen with bare arms, whose muscles rolled under the burnt skin. Their dames, in red or blue flannel, with blue or red sunshades open, dazzling in the brilliant sunlight, lolled on the rudder seats, and seemed to float along the water in their slumberous immobility. A tipsy student, bent on showing off, was rowing a kind of windmill stroke, and knocking up against all the boats, whose occupants greeted him with howls. He just missed drowning two swimmers, then disappeared aghast—followed by the jeers of the crowd packed on the floating café.

In the midst of this raffish medley Yvette strolled, all radiant, on Servigny's arm; she seemed quite content to be jostled by these dubious people, and stared undisturbed with her friendly eyes at the women.

"Look at that one, Muscade!" she said; "what pretty hair! They *do* look as if they were enjoying themselves!"

The pianist, an oarsman in red, hatted with

a sort of enormous parasol of straw, dashed into a waltz; Yvette, seizing her companion round the waist, carried him off with the fury she always threw into her dancing. They went on so long and so frenziedly that everyone looked at them. Some mounted the tables and beat a kind of measure with their feet; others clinked their glasses. The musician seemed suddenly to go mad, and, throwing his hands about, banged the keys with wild contortions of his whole body, nodding his head passionately under its vast cover. All at once he stopped, and, sliding to the floor, flattened himself out at full length, enshrouded under his headgear, as if he had perished of fatigue.

A roar of laughter burst out all over the café, and everyone applauded. Four friends hastened forward as if there had been an accident, and picking up their comrade, carried him off by his four limbs, after carefully depositing on his stomach the sort of roof he had worn on his head.

A joker, following them, intoned the *De Profundis*; and a procession was formed behind the counterfeit corpse, winding along the paths of the island, and gathering in its wake toppers, and strollers, and everyone it met.

Yvette flew along delighted, laughing heartily, chatting with any and everyone, half wild with the noise and excitement. Young

men looked right into her eyes and pushed against her; their glances were full of meaning, and Servigny began to fear the adventure might turn out ill.

The procession, however, continued its course, faster and faster, for the four bearers had begun to race, followed by the yelling crowd.

But suddenly they made for the bank, stopped dead at the edge, swung their comrade for a second, and, letting go all together, shot him into the river.

An immense shout of delight burst from every mouth, while the bewildered pianist shivered, swore, coughed, spat out the water, and, sticking in the mud, strove to remount the bank. His hat, floating down stream, was brought back by a boat.

Yvette, hopping with joy and clapping her hands, kept crying, "Oh! Muscade! oh! Muscade! What fun!"

But Servigny, who had recovered his seriousness, was watching her uneasily, annoyed to see her so thoroughly at home in these dubious surroundings. He instinctively revolted; for there was in him the natural aversion to vulgarity of every well-bred man, who, even in letting himself go, avoids familiarities too vile, contacts too soiling.

"Great Scot!" he thought, marvelling: 'you must have some nice blood in you, my

dear!" He felt inclined to use out loud the familiarity that already he applied to her in thought; the familiarity men use to women who are common property, the first time they set eyes on them.

In his thoughts he hardly distinguished her now from the auburn-haired creatures who brushed against them, bawling coarse words in their raucous voices. The air was full of those words—gross, short, and sounding—that seemed to hover over their heads, born of the crowd as flies are of a dunghill. They appeared to surprise and shock no one, and to pass unnoticed by Yvette.

"Muscade, I want to bathe," she said; "we'll go right out into mid-stream."

"Very well," he replied; and they went off to the office for bathing-dresses. She was ready first, and waited for him, standing on the bank, and smiling, under the eyes of all. They started side by side into the sun-warmed water.

Her swimming was full of a sort of ecstatic delight; and lapped by the ripples, shivering with a sensuous joy, she rose with every stroke as if she would spring out of the river. He followed with difficulty, panting, and by no means pleased to find himself so second-rate a performer. Then, slackening speed, she turned over abruptly and floated, with her arms crossed and her eyes lost in the blue of

the sky. He gazed at her stretched thus on the surface of the water, at the curving lines of her body, her bosom firm and round under the stuff of the clinging gown, her half-submerged limbs, her bare calves gleaming through the water, her little feet peeping out.

There she was from head to foot, as if thus displayed on purpose to tempt, and once more to fool him. His nerves were all on edge with the intensity of his exasperated longing: Suddenly she turned over again, and said laughingly:—

“ Oh, you do look funny !”

Piqued by her raillery, and possessed by the spiteful rage of a baffled lover, he gave way suddenly to a subtle desire for reprisals, a longing to avenge himself and wound her.

“ So that sort of life would suit you ?” he said.

“ What life ?” she asked, with her most innocent air.

“ Don't play the fool with me ! You know very well what I mean !”

“ No, honour bright.”

“ Now, let's have done with this nonsense. Will you, or won't you ?”

“ I don't in the least understand.”

“ You're not so stupid as that. Besides, I told you last night.”

“ What ? I forget.”

“ That I love you.”

" You ?"

" I."

" Rubbish !"

" I swear it."

" Very well, then ; prove it."

" That's just what I want."

" How do you mean, what you want—— ?"

" To prove."

" Very well, do."

" You didn't say that last night."

" You didn't propose anything."

" This is absurd !"

" Besides, it's not to me you ought to speak."

" You're very kind. To whom then ?"

" Why, to mother, of course !"

He gave a shout of laughter.

" To your mother ? Oh no ! That's a little too much."

She had suddenly become very serious, and looking straight into his eyes, said : " Listen, Muscade, if you really love me enough to marry me, speak to mother first ; I'll give you my answer afterwards."

He still thought she was chaffing him, and losing his temper completely, cried, " Mam'-zelle, what do you take me for ?"

She still gazed at him with her soft, clear eyes ; and hesitating, said, " I still don't understand you, really !"

Then, with something harsh and stinging in his voice, he exclaimed, " Now then, Yvette,

once for all let's have done with this absurd farce; it's been going on too long. You're playing the little simpleton; believe me, it's a rôle that doesn't suit you. You know well enough it can't be a question of marriage between us—but of love. I told you I loved you—it's the truth, and I say it again, I love you. Don't pretend not to understand me any longer, and don't treat me as if I were an idiot."

They were face to face in the water, keeping themselves up simply by little movements of their hands. She remained quite still for some seconds, as if she could not decide to take in the sense of his words, then suddenly blushed to the roots of her hair. The whole of her face was flooded with crimson from her throat to her ears, which grew almost purple, and, without answering a word, she fled towards the bank, swimming with all her strength. He could not catch her up, and gasped with the effort of following. He saw her leave the water, snatch up her cloak and gain her cabin, without once turning her head. He was a long time dressing, completely puzzled as to what to do next, racking his brains for what to say to her, and asking himself whether he ought to apologize or to persevere. When he was ready, she was gone, alone. He walked home slowly, anxious and perturbed.

The Marquise, on Saval's arm, was strolling round the path encircling the lawn.

On seeing Servigny she said with the air of serene indolence she had worn since the night before: "What did I tell you about going out in such a heat? There's Yvette with a sort of sunstroke. She's gone to lie down. The poor child was as red as a poppy, and has got a frightful headache. You must have been walking in the hot sun; you know you've been up to some nonsense—you're just as crazy as she!"

The young girl did not come down to dinner. When asked what she would have, she replied, without opening the door, that she was not hungry — she had locked herself in — and begged only to be left alone. The two young men departed by the ten o'clock train, promising to come again on the following Thursday; and the Marquise sat down to dream happily at her open window, while in the distance the orchestra at *La Grenouillère* flung its flighty music into the solemn silence of the night.

There were times when a passion for love would sweep over her, as a passion for riding or rowing will seize on a man; a mood of sudden tenderness would take possession of her like an illness. These passions pounced on her, invaded her body and soul, maddened, enervated, or overwhelmed her, according as they

were of an inspiring, violent, dramatic, or sentimental nature.

She was one of those women born to love and to be loved. From a very low beginning she had climbed by means of that love, of which she had made a profession almost without knowing. Behaving intuitively with innate ability, she accepted money and kisses without distinction, employing her wonderful instinct in the natural, unreasoning way that animals, made sagacious by their daily needs, have. She had had many lovers for whom she had felt no tenderness, yet at whose embraces she had known no disgust. She endured all their caresses with a quiet indifference, just as, when travelling, a man eats all sorts of foods to keep himself alive. But, now and then, her heart or her flesh took fire, and she gave way to a real passion, which lasted weeks or even months, according to the physical or moral qualities of her lover. These were the perfect moments of her life. She loved with all her soul, with all her body, with enthusiasm, with ecstasy. She cast herself into that love as one flings oneself into a river to drown; and she let herself be swept away, ready to die, if so she must, intoxicated, maddened, yet infinitely happy. Each time she imagined that never before had she felt anything so wonderful; and she would have been vastly astonished if you had recalled to her all the

different men over whom she had dreamed passionately, the whole night long, gazing at the stars.

Saval had captured her, body and soul. Under the spell of his image she mused over precious memories, deep in the supreme calm of fulfilled happiness, of present and certain joy.

A sound from behind made her turn. Yvette had just come in, dressed as she had been all day, but pale now, with the brilliant eyes that great fatigue will cause.

She leaned against the side of the window, opposite her mother.

"I've something to tell you," she said.

The Marquise looked at her in surprise. She was fond of her daughter in a selfish sort of fashion, proud of her beauty as one might be of great wealth; she was herself still too handsome to be jealous, and too lazy to make the plans that others credited her with; at the same time she was too subtle not to be aware of the girl's value.

"I'm listening, child," she said; "what is it?"

Yvette gazed at her as if she would read the depths of her soul, as if she meant to grasp all the shades of expression that her coming words might awaken.

"It's— Something extraordinary happened to-day!"

“ What ? ”

“ M. de Servigny told me he loved me. ”

The Marquise waited uneasily, but as Yvette said nothing, she asked: “ How did he tell you that ? Let me hear ! ”

Yvette nestled down in her favourite attitude at her mother's feet, and squeezing her hands, said: “ He asked me to marry him. ”

Mme. Obardi made an abrupt movement of stupefaction, and cried out: “ Servigny ! You must be mad. ”

Yvette had not taken her eyes off her mother's face, searching for the true meaning of her astonishment.

In a grave voice she asked: “ Why mad ? Why shouldn't M. de Servigny want to marry me ? ”

The Marquise stammered in embarrassment: “ You've made a mistake—it's out of the question. You couldn't have heard—you misunderstood. M. de Servigny is too rich for you, and too—too—Parisian ever to marry. ”

Yvette got up slowly. “ But if he loves me, mother, as he says he does ? ” she asked.

Her mother went on with a certain impatience: “ I thought you were big enough and knew enough about things not to have any such ideas as that. Servigny is a selfish man of the world. He'll only marry a woman

of his own rank and fortune. If he did ask you to marry him, he simply meant——”

The Marquise, unable to speak out her suspicions, was silent for a moment, then went on: “ There, don’t bother me; go to bed.”

And the young girl, as if she now knew all she wanted, replied obediently: “ Yes, mother.”

Just as she was going out of the door, however, the Marquise called: “ And what about your sunstroke ?”

“ I never had one. It was all this other affair.”

“ We’ll talk about that again,” added the Marquise; “ but take care not to be alone with him after this; you may be quite sure he doesn’t mean to marry you, only to—to—compromise you.”

She could find no better words to express her thought. Yvette went back to her room.

Mme. Obardi set to work to reflect.

Living for years in the serene atmosphere of gilded love, she had carefully guarded her mind from every thought that could preoccupy, trouble or sadden it. Never once had she allowed herself to face the question of what would become of Yvette; it would be time enough to think about that when the difficulty arose. Her courtesan’s instinct told her that her daughter could never marry a rich and well-born man save by some quite improbable

chance, one of those surprises of love that have placed adventuresses upon thrones.

She was not counting on any such thing, moreover, being too self-centred to make any plans not directly concerned with her own affairs.

Yvette would live for love, as her mother had done, no doubt. But the Marquise had never dared to ask herself when or how it would come about. And now here was her daughter, suddenly, without preparation, demanding of her an answer to one of those questions to which no answer could be given, forcing her to take up a definite attitude in an affair so difficult, so delicate, so dangerous in every way, so disturbing to her conscience, the conscience a mother is bound to have towards her child, in matters such as these. She had too much natural acumen, slumbering, it is true, but never quite asleep, to be deceived for a moment as to Servigny's intentions, for she had acquired a wide knowledge of men, and particularly of men of his kind. So, at the first words Yvette had spoken, she had been unable to help that exclamation: "Servigny marry you! you must be mad!"

Why had he made use of such a stale trick? He, that shrewd man of the world, that pleasure-loving rake? What would he do now? And how should she warn the child more plainly, how defend her? Obviously

she was capable of making a complete fool of herself. Who would have believed that that great girl had remained so simple, so ignorant, so artless ?

And the Marquise, puzzled, and already fatigued with too much thinking, racked her brains for what to do now, without finding any way out of so truly embarrassing a situation.

Tired of this bother she suddenly decided : " Ah, well ! I'll watch them carefully, and act according to circumstances ; if necessary, I'll speak to Servigny ; he's sharp enough to understand a hint."

She did not ask herself what she would say to him, nor what he might reply, nor what sort of arrangement could be arrived at between them, but happy at having smoothed out this troublesome matter without having had to make any decision, she went back to dreams of her Saval. With eyes lost in the night, turned towards the glowing haze that hung over Paris, she wafted kisses towards the great city, flinging them with both hands into the darkness, one after another, kisses without number ; and in a low voice, as though still speaking to him, she murmured : " I love you ! I love you !"

CHAPTER III

YVETTE, too, did not sleep. Like her mother, she leaned on her elbows at the open window, and tears, the first tears of real sadness, filled her eyes.

Till now she had grown up in the heedless, confident serenity of a joyous youth. What was there indeed to make her brood, reflect, or wonder? What to make her different from other young girls? Why should doubt, or fear, or painful suspicions visit her? She had seemed knowing because she had seemed to talk knowingly, having, naturally, caught up the tone, the manner, the risky sayings of the people round about her. But in reality she knew little more of life than a child brought up in a convent; her audacious speeches were like a parrot's, and came rather from her feminine faculty for assimilation and mimicry, than from any daring depth of knowledge.

She talked of love as the son of a painter or musician will talk of painting or music at the age of ten or twelve. She knew—or rather suspected—what sort of mystery lay behind that word; too many jokes had been

whispered in her hearing for her innocence to have remained entirely unenlightened. But was that a reason for concluding that other families were not like her own ?

Everyone kissed her mother's hand with ostentatious respect; their friends were all titled, and all were, or appeared to be, rich; all talked familiarly of royal personages. Two princes of the blood had actually come to some of her mother's evenings. How was she to know ? Then, too, she was by nature simple, and far from inquisitive; she had none of her mother's intuitive perception. Her mind was undisturbed, she was too much in love with life to worry over things which might have seemed suspicious to a quieter, more thoughtful, more reserved nature—to one less open-hearted, less exultant.

And now, in a moment, Servigny, with a few words, whose brutality she had felt rather than comprehended, had roused in her a sudden and at first unreasoning disquiet, which had gradually become a galling dread. She had fled home like a wounded creature, pierced to the heart by those words which she kept repeating over and over again, in the effort to sound all their meaning, and grasp their true import: " You know well enough it can't be a question of marriage between us—only of love !"

What had he meant by that ? And why

had he insulted her? There was clearly something that she did not know, something secret or shameful! No doubt she was the only one in ignorance. But what was it? She felt scared, overwhelmed, as if she had discovered some hidden infamy, treachery in some beloved friend—one of those disasters that wring the heart.

And she went on brooding, reflecting, searching, weeping, consumed by her doubts and fears.

But at last her young, buoyant nature reasserted itself. She began constructing a story, an abnormal and dramatic situation woven out of many memories of the many romantic novels she had read. She recalled startling turns of fortune, sombre, heart-breaking plots, and out of the jumble made up a life-story of herself, to adorn this half-hidden mystery surrounding her life.

She was already a little less miserable, and, wrapped in reverie, began lifting mysterious veils, imagining impossible complications, a thousand curious and terrible events, whose very strangeness had a fascination.

Could she, by any chance, be the natural child of some prince? Her poor mother, seduced and abandoned, created Marquise by the King, Victor Emanuel himself perhaps, and obliged to fly from the wrath of the family? Or was she not more likely the offshoot of a guilty passion, abandoned by very

illustrious parents, and rescued by the Marquise, who had adopted her and brought her up?

And fresh ideas kept coming into her head, which she accepted or rejected according to her fancy. She began to have a sort of tender pity for herself, happy and sad, too, in the depths of her heart, yet on the whole content to find herself a heroine of romance, who would have to show herself capable of playing a dignified and noble part.

And she thought over the rôle she would assume, according to these various sets of circumstances. She pictured it vaguely, this rôle, like a character of M. Scribe's or Mme. Sand's. It should be made up of devotion, nobility, self-sacrifice, greatness of soul, tenderness, and beautiful speeches. Her flexible nature almost rejoiced in this new prospect.

So she stayed until the evening, thinking what she was going to do, and how best she should set to work to drag the truth out of the Marquise. And when night was come, the hour of tragic situations, she had at last devised this simple but subtle trick to obtain what she wanted:—

To tell her mother suddenly that Servigny had asked her to marry him.

At the news Mme. Obardi, in her surprise, would certainly let fall some word, some ejaculation that would throw light into her daughter's soul.

And Yvette had forthwith carried out her plan.

She had expected an outburst of astonishment, an outpouring of love, some disclosure full of caresses and tears.

And behold ! Her mother, neither astounded nor distressed, had only seemed annoyed ; and from the embarrassed, displeased, troubled tone of her reply, the young girl, in whom had suddenly awakened all a woman's shrewd subtlety and dissimulation, understood that she must not insist, that the mystery was of some other kind, more painful to learn, probably, and that she would have to guess it for herself. She had gone back to her room with a heavy heart, in dire distress, crushed now by the sense of a real misfortune, without knowing exactly whence or wherefore came this new feeling. Leaning on her elbows at the window, she wept.

She sobbed a long time, without thinking at all now, or trying to make any more discoveries ; then little by little fatigue overcame her, and her eyes closed. She fell for a few minutes into that unrefreshing slumber of people too exhausted to make the effort of undressing and getting to bed—a heavy sleep, broken by sudden starts, as her head kept slipping between her hands. She did not go to bed till the first gleam of dawn, when the penetrating chill of the early morning forced her to leave the window.

The next day, and the day after, she maintained a reserved and melancholy demeanour.

A ceaseless ferment of thought was going on within her; she was learning to watch, and deduce, and reflect. A new and lurid light seemed cast on everyone and everything around; she was beginning to look with suspicion on all she had once believed in, even on her mother. During those two days all kinds of surmises flitted through her brain, and, facing each possible contingency, she flung herself, with all the abruptness of her headlong, unbalanced nature, from one extreme decision to another.

On the Wednesday she fixed on a plan which embodied a complete scheme of conduct, and a system of espionage. She got up on Thursday morning with the resolve to outvie the subtlety of a detective, to be armed for battle against all the world. She even resolved to take for her motto the two words, "Myself alone!" and considered for over an hour how they would make the best effect engraved round the monogram on her writing paper.

Saval and Servigny arrived at ten o'clock. The young girl held out her hand to them quite simply, but coolly, saying in a friendly, rather grave voice: "How do you do, Muscade?"

"Thank you, Mam'zelle, pretty well—and you?"

He watched her. "What game is she up to now?" he asked himself.

The Marquise had taken Saval's arm, and he gave his own to Yvette; they all sauntered round the lawn, winding in and out of the clumps of bushes and trees. Yvette moved along reflectively, her eyes fixed on the gravel path; she hardly seemed to listen to her companion, hardly answered him. All at once she asked: "Are you really my friend, Muscade?"

"I am, Mam'zelle."

"Really, really and truly?"

"Absolutely your friend, Mam'zelle, body and soul."

"Friend enough not to tell me a fib for once, just for this once?"

"Even for twice, if necessary."

"Friend enough to tell me the whole truth, the whole horrid truth?"

"Yes, Mam'zelle."

"All right then: what do you really, *really* think of Prince Kravalow?"

"Phe-e-ew!"

"There, you see, you're getting ready to tell me a fib directly."

"Not at all, I'm merely choosing the exact words. Well, then, Prince Kravalow is a Russian—a Russian of the Russians, speaks Russian, was born in Russia, who quite possibly had a passport for France, and has

nothing false about him but his name and his title."

She looked straight into his eyes: "You mean that he's——"

After a moment's hesitation he replied: "An adventurer, Mam'zelle."

"Thank you. And the Chevalier Valréali is no better, I suppose?"

"Just so."

"And M. de Belvigne?"

"Ah! he's different. He's a gentleman—provincial, of course; honourable—up to a certain point—but a little burnt about the wings, from having flown too fast——"

"And you?"

He answered without hesitation: "I? Oh, I'm what you call a 'gay bird'—of good enough family, who once had brains, and has hashed them up making jokes; who once had a constitution, and has run through it playing the fool; who once had a certain value perhaps, and has squandered it doing nothing. To sum up, I've got money, and experience of life, a complete absence of prejudice, a pretty fair contempt for men, including women, profound consciousness of my own futility, and vast toleration of riff-raff in general. However, I've still got my moments of frankness, you see, and I'm even capable of affection, as you *might* see—if you liked. With these defects and qualities, I put my-

self, morally and physically, at your service, to dispose of as you please. There !”

She did not laugh; but seemed, as she listened, to be weighing the meaning of his words.

She began again: “What do you think of the Comtesse de Lammy ?”

He said very quickly: “Ah ! Allow me to give no opinion on women.”

“On none ?”

“None.”

“Then, it’s because you think very badly of them all. Come, now, can’t you think of a single exception ?”

His insolent smile that was half a sneer reappeared, and with the cynical audacity he used like a weapon, both for attack and defence, said: “Present company always excepted.”

She flushed a little, but asked quite calmly: “Well, what do you think of *me* ?”

“You *will* have it ? Very well. I think that you’re a person of excellent practical sense, or, if you like it better, of excellent common sense, understanding perfectly how to mask your game, amuse yourself at other people’s expense, hide your plans, throw out your nets, and wait calmly—for the result.”

“Is that all ?”

“That’s all.”

“I shall make you change that opinion,

Muscade," she said very gravely; and joined her mother, who was strolling languidly along with her head bent, like a woman talking of tender, intimate things, and tracing as she went patterns, or perhaps letters, on the gravel path with the point of her sunshade. She was not looking at Saval, but speaking on and on in a slow voice, leaning on his arm, and pressing against him. Yvette suddenly fixed her eyes upon her; a suspicion, so vague that she could not seize it, a sensation rather than a doubt, flitted through her brain, like the shadow of a wind-chased cloud passing over the earth.

The bell sounded for breakfast.

It was a silent, almost mournful meal.

There was the feeling of storm in the air. Great motionless clouds seemed ambushed on the far horizon, dumb, weighty, loaded with tempest. They had just taken coffee on the terrace, when the Marquise said: "Well, darling, are you going for a walk to-day with M. de Servigny? It's just the weather for strolling under the trees!"

Yvette gave her a rapid glance, quickly averted: "No, mother, I'm not going out to-day."

The Marquise seemed annoyed: "Oh! go and take a turn, my child," she persisted; "it's so good for you."

"No, mother," repeated Yvette brusquely,

" I mean to stay at home to-day, and you know quite well why, I told you the other evening."

Mme. Obardi, absorbed in the desire to be alone with Saval, had forgotten. She reddened, grew confused; and, uneasy on her own account, wondering how on earth she would get an hour or so free, she stammered: " Of course, that never occurred to me; you're quite right. I don't know what I was thinking about."

Taking up a piece of embroidery which she had nicknamed the " public welfare," and on which she employed her fingers when in the doldrums—perhaps five or six times in the year—Yvette sat down in a low chair near her mother, while the two young men, astride of their seats, smoked their cigars.

So the hours passed, in languid talk that was continually dying away. The Marquise, her nerves on edge, and casting despairing glances at Saval, was seeking some pretext for getting rid of her daughter. She realized at last that she would never succeed, and at her wit's end said to Servigny: " You know, my dear Duke, I mean to keep you both here to-night. To-morrow we'll go and breakfast at the Restaurant Fournaise, at Chatou."

He understood at once, smiled, and replied with a bow: " We are entirely at your disposal, Marquise."

The day slipped slowly and sadly away,

under the menace of the storm. At last the dinner-hour came. The lowering sky kept filling with slow, heavy clouds. There was not a breath of air.

The evening meal was silent too. A feeling of discomfort and constraint, a sort of vague fear, seemed to hold the two men and the two women dumb.

When the table was cleared they stayed on the terrace, speaking only now and then. The night fell, a stifling night. All at once, the horizon was torn by a great hook of fire, which, with a blinding, wan flame, illumined the four faces shrouded in the gloom. And a distant sound, a dull, faint noise, like the rolling of a carriage over a bridge, travelled along the earth, and the heat of the atmosphere seemed to increase, to become suddenly more overwhelming, the silence of the evening more profound.

Yvette got up. "I'm going to bed," she said; "the storm makes me feel so queer."

She bent her forehead to the Marquise, gave her hand to the two young men, and disappeared.

Her room was just over the terrace, and the leaves of a great chestnut-tree planted opposite the front door were presently lit up with a greenish light; Servigny kept his eyes fixed on that pale glow among the foliage, across which he fancied he could now and then see

a shadow pass. But suddenly the light went out. Mme. Obardi drew a long, deep breath. "My daughter's in bed," she said.

Servigny got up: "I think I'll follow her example, Marquise, if you'll excuse me."

He kissed the hand she gave him, and disappeared.

She remained alone with Saval in the darkness, and the next moment she was in his arms, clasping him to her. Then, though he tried to prevent it, she knelt before him, murmuring: "I must look at you by the blaze of the lightning."

But Yvette, having blown out her candle, had come back to her balcony, stealing bare-foot like a shadow; she listened, consumed by painful and confused suspicions.

She could not see, being exactly above them, on the roof of the verandah itself.

She heard nothing but a murmur of voices, and her heart beat so fast that it filled her ears with its noise. A window was suddenly shut above her head. So Servigny had gone up to his room! Her mother was alone with the other. A second flash cleft the sky in two, and for a second made the whole well-known landscape start forth with a violent, sinister clearness; and she saw the great river, the colour of molten lead, like a river in the fantastic land of dreams. And at that moment a voice beneath her said: "I love you!"

She heard no more. A strange shiver passed through her whole body, and her brain wandered in the whirl of a frightful emotion. A heavy, unending silence, that seemed the very silence eternal, brooded over the world. She could no longer breathe, her heart weighed down by something unknown and horrible. Once more a flash kindled the sky, and illumined the horizon, another followed, and yet others.

And the voice that she had already heard repeated in a louder tone: "Ah! how I love you! how I love you!"

Yvette knew that voice too well—the voice of her mother.

A large drop of lukewarm water fell on her forehead, and a tiny tremor, barely perceptible, ran through the leaves, the shiver of the rain just beginning.

Then a clamour came hurrying from afar, a confused clamour, like wind among branches; the heavy shower beating in a sheet upon the earth, the river, the trees. Quickly the water streamed all round her, splashing, covering, soaking her like a bath. She did not stir, thinking only of what they were doing on the terrace. She heard them get up, and mount the stairs to their rooms; the noise of doors shutting in the house. And, obeying an irresistible longing to know, that tortured and maddened her, the young girl flew down the

stairs, gently opened the outer door, and crossing the lawn under the furious beat of the rain, ran and hid herself in the bushes, to watch the windows.

Her mother's alone was lighted. And suddenly two shadows appeared, framed in the bright square, side by side. Then, drawing closer, they made but one; and by the lightning which again flung a vivid blinding jet of fire on the face of the house, she saw them embracing, their arms clasped around each other's necks.

Wildly, without thinking or knowing what she did, she cried with all her strength, in a piercing voice: "Mother!" as one cries out to warn another of some deadly danger.

Her despairing appeal was smothered in the splashing of the rain, but the embracing couple started uneasily apart, and one of the shadows vanished, while the other sought to distinguish something among the dark shadows of the garden.

Then, fearing to be discovered, to meet her mother at such a moment, Yvette fled towards the house, flew up the stairs, leaving behind her a trail of water that dripped from step to step, and shut herself in her room, resolved to open her door to no one.

Without taking off the streaming dress that clung to her skin, she fell on her knees, and clasping her hands, implored in her distress,

divine protection, that mysterious help from heaven, that unknown aid we pray for in hours of agony and despair.

Every minute great flashes kept throwing their livid light into the room, and suddenly she saw her reflection in the glass of her wardrobe, with hair unbound and dripping, so strange that she failed to recognize herself.

She remained there a long time, so long that the storm had passed over without her being conscious of it. The rain ceased falling, light came into the sky, though it was still dark with clouds, and a warm, sweet, fragrant freshness, the freshness of wet grass and leaves, drifted in at the open window.

Yvette rose, mechanically took off her limp, cold clothes, and went to bed. There she remained, with eyes fixed on the dawn.

She wept again, then again she began thinking.

Her mother with a lover! The shame of it! But she had read so many books where women, mothers even, abandoned themselves like that, to rise again to honour at the end of the story, that she was not beyond measure amazed to find herself thus entangled in a drama so like all the dramas she had read of.

Her grief, the cruel bewilderment of the shock, were already losing a little of their violence in the confused memory of similar situations. Her thoughts had roved among

such tragic adventures, so romantically introduced by novelists, that the horrible discovery began little by little to seem like the natural continuation of a story commenced yesterday.

"I will save my mother," she said to herself. And, almost tranquillized by this heroic resolve, she felt strong, great, ready all at once for her devoted struggle. She thought over the means she would employ. One only commended itself to her romantic nature. And as an actor prepares the scene he is about to play, so she began to prepare the interview she would have with the Marquise.

The sun had risen. The servants were busy about the house, and the maid came with her chocolate. Yvette told her to put the tray down on the table, and said: "Go and tell my mother that I'm not well to-day, that I'm going to stay in bed till those gentlemen are gone. I haven't been able to sleep all night, and I don't wish to be disturbed; I'm going to try and rest now."

The maid looked in surprise at the wet dress, lying like a rag on the carpet: "Why, Mademoiselle, you've been out!" she said.

"Yes, I went for a walk in the rain to freshen myself up."

The girl picked up the petticoats, stockings, and muddy shoes, and went off, carrying them over one arm, with disdainful precau-

tions; they were soaked for all the world like the clothes of a drowned woman. Yvette waited, knowing that her mother would come. The Marquise entered, having jumped out of bed at the first words of the maid, for a doubt had remained in her mind ever since that cry of "Mother!" heard out of the darkness.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked.

Yvette looked at her, and faltered: "I—I've——" Then, overcome by a sudden and terrible emotion, she began to choke with sobs.

The Marquise, in astonishment, asked again: "What is the matter with you?"

Forgetting all her plans and prepared phrases, the young girl hid her face in her two hands and sobbed out: "Oh! mother, oh! mother!"

Mme. Obardi remained standing by the bedside, too disturbed to altogether understand, but guessing nearly all, with that subtle instinct wherein lay her strength.

And since Yvette, choked by her sobs, could not speak, her mother, at last quite unstrung, and feeling the approach of some formidable explanation, abruptly asked: "Come, will you tell me what's taken possession of you?"

Yvette could scarcely articulate the words: "Last night—I saw—your window!"

Very pale, the Marquise exclaimed: "Well, what then?"

Her daughter continued to sob: "Oh! mother, oh! mother!"

Mme. Obardi, whose dread and embarrassment were quickly changing into anger, shrugged her shoulders, and turned to go away: "I really think you're mad," she said; "when this is over, perhaps you'll let me know."

But the young girl suddenly took her hands from her face, which was streaming with tears. "No! listen! I *must* speak—listen! Promise me!—we'll go away together, ever so far, into the country, and live like peasants; and no one will know what has become of us! Oh! mother, will you? I beg, I implore—will you?"

The Marquise, dumbfounded, remained in the middle of the room. She had the irascible blood of the "people" in her veins. Then, a feeling of shame, the shame of a mother, began to mingle with the vague alarm and exasperation of a passionate woman whose love is menaced; she was shivering, ready either to ask pardon or fling herself into a fury. "I don't understand you," she said.

Yvette went on: "I saw you! Oh! mother—last night. It must never—if you only knew! Let's go away together—I'll love you so, that you'll forget——"

In a trembling voice Mme. Obardi began: "Listen, my child; there are things that you

don't yet understand. Well—don't forget—never forget, that I forbid you—ever to speak to me—of—of those things."

But Yvette, suddenly assuming the rôle of saviour she had marked out for herself, declared: "No, mother, I'm no longer a child; I've a right to know. Well, I *do* know that we receive all sorts of people, adventurers—and that we're not respected, because of that; and I know something else too. It mustn't be, can't you understand? I can't bear it; we'll work if we must, and live like honest women, somewhere, far away. And if I should happen to marry, so much the better."

Her mother looked at her with her black, angry eyes, and answered: "You're mad. You'll do me the favour of getting up, and coming down to lunch with us all."

"No, mother. There's someone I won't see again; you know what I mean. He must leave this house, or I will. You must choose between us."

She was sitting up in bed, and she raised her voice, speaking as people speak on the stage, entering fully at last into the drama of which she had dreamed, and almost forgetting her grief in the absorption of her mission.

The Marquise, finding nothing else to say, repeated the words: "You must be mad——"

Yvette continued with theatrical energy:

“ No, mother, that man must leave the house, or I will myself—I shan’t flinch.”

“ And where will you go? What will you do?”

“ I don’t know; I don’t care. Only let us be honest women!”

The recurrence of this expression, “ honest women,” aroused the fury of a street girl in the Marquise, and she shouted: “ Hold your tongue! I won’t allow you to speak to me like that! I’m as good as anyone else, d’you hear? I’m a courtesan! and I’m proud of it! I’m worth a dozen of your ‘ honest women ’!”

Yvette gazed at her aghast, stammering: “ Oh, mother!”

But the Marquise, more and more excited, cried: “ Well, I *am* a courtesan; what then? If I were not a courtesan, you’d be a kitchen-maid, as I was once; and you’d earn thirty sous a day, and wash up plates and dishes, and your mistress would send you on errands to the butcher’s—do you hear? and she’d turn you out of doors if you idled; whereas you idle and amuse yourself all day long, just because I *am* a courtesan. So there! When you’re only a servant, a poor girl with fifty francs of savings, you’ve got to find a way out of it, if you don’t mean to die in the workhouse; yes, and there are no two ways for us women, d’you hear, no two ways,

when you're a servant ! Women can't make their fortunes by jobbery and swindling. We've nothing but our bodies—nothing but our bodies !”

She beat her breast like a penitent confessing, and all flushed and excited, came towards the bed, crying : “ So much the worse for a girl that's handsome, she must live on her looks, or grind along in poverty all her life—all her life ! There's no choice !”

Then, reverting to her original idea : “ And do *they* starve themselves, your good women ? Not they ! It's *they* who are the drabs, d'you hear ?—because they're not obliged to. They have money, plenty to live on, plenty to amuse them—and yet they have their lovers ! That's vice ! It's *they* who are the drabs !”

She stood close to the bed, where Yvette, distraught, ready to shout for help, ready to rush away, was crying loudly like a child that is being beaten.

The Marquise stopped, and seeing her daughter in such a desperate state, was herself seized with grief, remorse, tenderness, pity ; falling on the bed with outstretched arms, she too began to sob, murmuring : “ My child, my poor child ; if you only knew how you hurt me !”

And so they wept together, for a long time.

Then the Marquise, with whom grief never lasted, gently raised herself, and said very

gently: "Come, darling, things *are* like that, you know! We can't alter them now. We must take life as it comes!"

But Yvette continued to weep. The blow had been too heavy and unexpected for her to collect and control herself.

Her mother went on: "Come, get up, and come to lunch, so that nobody will notice anything."

The young girl shook her head, unable to speak; at last she said in a halting voice, strangled with sobs: "No, mother, you know what I told you; I can't change. I will not come out of my room until they're gone. I don't want to see any more of men of that kind—never—never. If they come back I—I—you'll never see me again."

The Marquise had dried her eyes, and, tired by her emotion, murmured: "Come, think; be reasonable!" Then, after a minute of silence, she added: "Well, perhaps it *is* better for you to rest this morning. I'll come and see you in the afternoon."

And, already quite calm again, she kissed her daughter on the forehead, and left the room to finish dressing.

As soon as her mother had disappeared, Yvette sprang up to bolt the door, so that she might be quite alone, and set to work to think.

Towards eleven o'clock the maid knocked, and asked through the door: "Mme. la Mar-

quise wishes to know if Mademoiselle wants anything, and what she would like for breakfast?"

"I'm not hungry," replied Yvette; "I only want to be left alone."

And she remained in bed, as though she had been seriously ill.

Towards three o'clock there came another knock. "Who's there?" she asked.

Her mother's voice replied: "It's I, darling; I've come to see how you are——"

She hesitated what to do, then unfastened the door, and went back to bed.

The Marquise came up to her, and speaking in a hushed voice, as though to a convalescent, asked: "Well, do you feel better? Couldn't you eat an egg?"

"No, thank you, nothing."

Mme. Obardi sat down beside the bed, and they stayed without speaking; then, at last, as her daughter remained motionless, with hands resting inertly on the sheets, she asked: "Aren't you going to get up?"

"Presently," replied Yvette.

Then in a grave and slow voice, she added: "Mother, I've been thinking a great deal; and this is what I've decided. The past is the past; we won't talk about it again. But the future must be different—or else—or else, I know what's left for me to do. Now, we won't talk about it any more."

The Marquise, who had believed the explanation over, felt her impatience rising again. It was really too much. This great goose of a girl ought to have understood long ago ! But she made no answer, and only repeated: " Are you going to get up ? "

" Yes, I'm ready now. "

Her mother acted as lady's-maid, fetching her stockings, corset, and petticoats; then, kissing her, said: " Shall we go for a stroll before dinner ? "

" Yes, mother. "

They went for a walk along the river-side, talking chiefly of the most trivial things.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning Yvette went off alone, and seated herself at the spot where Servigny had read to her the history of the ant. "I won't stir from here until I've made up my mind," she said to herself.

The swift current of the main stream flowed by just at her feet; it was full of eddies and great bubbles that passed in a silent flight of little swirling pools. Already she had stared at every side of the problem, at every possible way of solution.

What should she do if her mother failed to scrupulously preserve the condition she had imposed, failed to renounce her life, her friends, everything, to go and hide with her in some far distant place?

She might run away—go alone. But where—and how? And what was she to live on?

By working! But at what? To whom would she go to find work? And then the mournful, humble existence of a poor work-girl seemed to her a little ignominious, not quite worthy of her. She thought of becoming a governess, like the young persons in novels, and of being loved and wedded by the son of

the house. But for *that*, high birth was a *sine quâ non*, so that when the angry father reproached her for stealing his son's love, she might be able to reply proudly: " My name is Yvette Obardi !"

And this she could not do. Besides, it was a commonplace, stale idea.

The convent was hardly better. She felt no vocation for the religious life, having but fitful, intermittent moments of piety. No one would step in and marry a girl with her antecedents. No help from any *man* was to be thought of for an instant. There was no possible way out, nothing definite that she could have recourse to. And then, it must be some forceful issue, something really great and strong, that would serve as an example; and she resolved on death. She decided on it all at once, quietly, as if it were a question of taking a journey; without reflecting or realizing the nature of death, without seeing that it is the end without possibility of re-commendation, the departure without return, the eternal farewell to this earth, to life.

She felt at once well-disposed towards this great resolution, with all the irresponsibility of a young, romantic spirit.

She mused over the means she might employ; but all seemed so painful and hazardous in the doing, and demanded, too,

an act of violence, which was repugnant to her.

She very quickly abandoned the idea of dagger or pistol, which may merely wound, cripple, or disfigure, and require, too, a steady, practised hand; rejected hanging as too common, a ridiculous and ugly method only fit for paupers; and drowning, because she could swim. So there only remained poison; but which? Nearly all caused suffering and provoked violent sickness. She wished neither to suffer, nor to be sick. At last she thought of chloroform, having read in some paper how a young woman had set to work to suffocate herself by this method.

And she felt at once a kind of joy in her resolve, a certain private pride, a sense of self-esteem. They should see what she was made of, what she was worth!

Returning to Bougival, she went into a chemist's, and asked him for a little chloroform for an aching tooth. The man, who knew her, gave her a very small phial of the narcotic.

Then she started off on foot to Croissy, where she procured another little bottle of the poison. She obtained a third at Chatou, and a fourth at Reuil, and got home late for lunch. Being very hungry after this round, she ate a hearty meal, thoroughly famished after so much exercise.

Her mother, delighted to see her with such

an appetite, and feeling herself safe at last, said, as they rose from table: "All our friends are coming to spend Sunday with us. I've invited the prince, the chevalier, and M. de Belvigne."

Yvette turned rather white, but made no reply.

She went out almost at once, and making for the station took a ticket for Paris.

During the whole afternoon, she went from chemist to chemist, buying from each a few drops of chloroform.

She returned in the evening with her pockets full of little bottles. This campaign she renewed on the morrow, and going by chance into a druggist's, succeeded at one stroke in buying about half a pint. On Saturday she did not go out; it was a close, overcast day, and she spent the whole of it on the terrace, lounging in a long cane chair. She hardly thought about anything at all, but felt very resolute and calm.

The next day, wishing to look her best, she put on a blue dress that suited her extremely well, and, gazing at herself in the glass, thought suddenly: "To-morrow I shall be dead!" A strange shiver passed through her from head to foot.

"Dead! Never to speak, never to think; no one to see me any more. And I—I shall never see all this again."

She scrutinized her face as if she had never seen it before, and especially her eyes—discovering a thousand new traits, a hidden character in that face that she had been quite unaware of; and she was astonished at the look of herself, as if she had in front of her some strange person, some new friend. She thought: "It's I, yes! it's I, in that glass. How weird it is to look at oneself! And yet, without mirrors we should never know our faces. Everyone else would know what we were like, but *we* should never know." She took her thick, plaited tresses of hair, and brought them over on to her bosom, following each gesture and attitude with attentive eyes. "How pretty I am!" she thought. "Tomorrow I shall be dead; dead, over there, on my bed."

She looked at her bed, and seemed to see herself stretched upon it, white, like the sheets.

Dead! in a week that face, those eyes and cheeks would be nothing but a black horror, in a box, deep down in the earth! And a terrible anguish wrung her heart.

The clear sunlight fell in flecks on all the country round, and in at the window came the sweet morning air. She sat down, still thinking: "Dead!" It seemed as if the world must be coming to an end before her eyes; and yet, it was not that! For nothing in the

world would be changed, not even her room. No, her room would be there just the same, with the same bed and chairs and mirror, but *she* would be gone for ever and ever, and no one would be grieved, except perhaps her mother.

People would say: "Little Yvette! How pretty she was!" and that would be all. And as she looked at her hand resting on the arm of the chair, she mused again over that decay, that black nauseous mass that would be her body. And once more a great shiver of horror ran over her whole frame. She could not comprehend how it was that she could disappear without the whole world coming to naught, so deeply did she feel that she was a part of everything, of the earth, the air, the sun, and of life.

There was a burst of laughter from the garden, a hubbub of voices and cries, the noisy merriment of a country-house party just assembled; she recognized the sonorous organ of M. de Belvigne, singing:—

" Je suis sous ta fenêtre,
Ah! daigne enfin paraître!"

She got up without thinking, and looked out. They all applauded. The whole five of them were there, as well as two other men whom she did not know.

She started back, torn by the thought that these men had come to amuse themselves at the house of her mother, the courtesan.

The lunch-bell rang.

"I will show them how to die," she said to herself.

And she walked firmly downstairs, with something of the resolution of the Christian martyrs entering the arena where the lions awaited them.

She shook hands with the guests, smiling rather superciliously.

"Are you less grumpy to-day, Mam'zelle?" asked Servigny.

In a grave and curious tone of voice she answered: "To-day I'm going to run wild. I'm in my Paris mood; take care!"

Then, turning towards M. de Belvigne, she added: "You shall be my pet to-day, my little Malvoisie. I'm going to take you all to Marly fair, after lunch." Marly fair was, in fact, going on.

The two newcomers were presented to her as Count Tamine and the Marquis de Briquetot. During the meal she hardly spoke, setting her mind hard on being gay all the afternoon, so that no one might guess anything, but be all the more astonished, and say: "Who could have thought it? She seemed so happy and contented! What enigmas they are—people like that!"

She forced herself not to think at all about the evening, for that was the time she had chosen, when they would all be on the terrace.

She drank as much wine as she could, to raise her spirits, and two liqueur glasses of brandy; she rose from the table flushed and a little giddy, hot all over her body, hot, as it seemed to her, to the very soul; but reckless and ready for anything.

“Come along!” she cried.

Taking M. de Belvigne’s arm, she issued her marching orders to the others: “Now, battalion, form up! Servigny, you’re to be sergeant; take the outside, on the right, and make the two Exotics, the foreign legion, march in front—the prince and the chevalier, of course; in the rear, the two recruits, who are under arms for the first time. March!”

They started. Servigny began to imitate the bugle, while the two newcomers made believe to play the drum. M. de Belvigne, a little embarrassed, said in a whisper: “Do be reasonable, Mlle. Yvette; you’ll compromise yourself, you know!”

“It’s you I’m compromising, Raisiné,” she replied; “as to myself, I don’t care a rap. It’ll be all the same to-morrow! So much the worse for you; you shouldn’t go about with a girl like me!”

They passed through Bougival, to the amazement of the folk in the streets, who all turned to stare at them. People came out on their doorsteps; travellers by the little railway from Reuil to Marly hooted at them, and men

standing on the platform of the cars, shouted: "Give 'em a ducking!"

Yvette marched with a military step, holding M. de Belvigne by the arm as if he were a prisoner. She was far from laughing, but had a frozen, sinister expression on her pale, grave face.

Every now and then Servigny would stop bugling and shout commands. The prince and the chevalier were vastly amused, finding it all extremely droll and *chic*; the two young men continued to play the drum without ceasing.

On arriving at the fair they made quite a sensation. Girls clapped their hands; young men sniggered; a fat gentleman with his wife on his arm said in an envious tone: "Well, *they're* not bored!" She caught sight of a merry-go-round, and made Belvigne get up alongside her, while her squadron scrambled up behind them on to the wooden horses. And when that turn was over, she refused to dismount, compelling her escort to take five journeys running on their ridiculous nags, to the immense joy of the public, who kept up a fire of jokes. M. de Belvigne returned to earth livid and giddy.

Then she began wandering through the booths, and caused all her companions to be weighed in the midst of a ring of spectators. She insisted on their buying absurd toys and carrying them in their arms. The prince and

the chevalier began to find the joke a little overdone; Servigny and the two drummers alone maintained their spirits.

At last they arrived at the far end, and she gazed at her followers with eyes full of subtle malevolence, full of a weird fancy that had come into her head. Ranging them on the right bank overlooking the river, she called out: "Let him who cares for me most throw himself into the water!"

No one stirred. A regular mob had formed behind them. Some women in white aprons watched them open-mouthed, and two troopers, in red trousers, laughed a stupid laugh.

"So," she began again, "not one of you will throw himself into the water when I ask you!"

Servigny muttered: "H'm! Needs must when the——!" and leaped upright into the river.

His plunge flung drops to Yvette's very feet. A murmur of astonishment and glee arose from the crowd.

The young girl picked up a little piece of wood from the ground and threw it out into the stream. "Fetch it, then!" she cried.

The young man started swimming, and seizing the floating stick in his mouth like a dog, brought it back, and climbing the bank, dropped on one knee to present it to her.

"Good dog!" she said, taking it and giving him a friendly pat on the head.

A stout lady exclaimed in great indignation :
“ Is it possible !”

“ Pretty way of amusing yourself !” said another.

“ Wouldn't catch me taking a bath for the sake of a wench !” remarked a man.

She took Belvigne's arm once more with the cutting remark : “ *You're* a slacker, my friend ; you don't know what you've missed !”

And now they started for home. She flung angry looks to right and left at the passers-by. “ How silly all these people look !” she said ; and, raising her eyes to her companion's face, added : “ And you too !”

M. de Belvigne bowed. Turning round, she perceived that the prince and the chevalier had disappeared. Servigny, mournful and dripping, no longer played the bugle, but walked with a melancholy air alongside the two weary young men who no longer played the drum. She laughed dryly. “ You seem to have had enough of it ! And yet you call this amusing yourselves, don't you ? That's what you came for ; well, I've given you your money's worth !”

She walked on without another word ; and all of a sudden Belvigne saw that she was crying : “ What's the matter ?” he asked in amazement.

“ Let me alone,” she murmured, “ it's nothing to do with you.”

But like an idiot he insisted : “ Come,

Mademoiselle; what *is* the matter? Has anyone annoyed you?"

"Do be quiet!" she repeated impatiently.

And suddenly, no longer able to withstand the despairing sadness that flooded her heart, she began to sob so violently that she could not go on.

Covering her face with her two hands, she stood gasping for breath, strangled, stifled by the violence of her grief.

Belvigne remained standing by her side, quite distracted, saying over and over again: "I can't understand it!"

But Servigny came hastily forward: "Let's get home, Mam'zelle; don't let people see you crying in the streets! Why do you do these mad things; they only upset you!" And, taking her by the elbow, he hurried her along. But as soon as they had reached the villa gate, she broke away, darted across the garden, rushed upstairs, and shut herself in her room. She did not reappear till dinner-time, and then was very pale and grave. All the rest, however, were in excellent spirits. Servigny had bought a suit of workman's clothes at a neighbouring shop, corduroy trousers, flowered shirt, vest, and overall, and had assumed the accent of the working man.

Yvette longed for the end of dinner. She felt her courage failing, and as soon as coffee had been served, she again went up to her room.

Under her window she could hear their festive voices. The chevalier was indulging in risky jokes—clumsy, foreign witticisms. She listened despairingly. Servigny, a little tipsy, began imitating a drunken workman, calling the Marquise “Missis !” Suddenly he turned to Saval, and said, “Hallo, Master !”

There was a general laugh.

At this Yvette hesitated no longer. She first took a sheet of her writing-paper, and wrote :

“BOUGIVAL,

“*Sunday, 9 p.m.*

“I am dying, to keep myself an honest girl.

“YVETTE.”

Then a postscript :

“Good-bye, dear mother ; forgive me !”

She addressed the envelope “Mme. la Marquise Obardi,” and sealed it ; then wheeled her sofa up to the window, drew a little table within reach of her hand, and placed on it the large bottle of chloroform beside a handful of cotton-wool.

An immense rose-tree covered with flowers, which grew from the terrace close to her window, gave out into the night air a faint, sweet perfume, drifting up in soft breaths, and for some minutes she sat drinking it in. The moon in its first quarter floated in the dark sky, nibbled, as it were, on the left-hand edge, and veiled at times by little clouds.

“ I am going to die !” thought Yvette ; “ to die !” And sobs welled up in her heart, that seemed to be breaking, to be suffocating her. She felt a longing to ask for mercy, to be rescued, to be loved.

Then she heard Servigny’s voice telling an improper story, interrupted every moment by peals of laughter. The Marquise was more amused than all the rest, and kept repeating : “ Nobody can tell a story like him ! Ha ! ha ! ha !”

Yvette took up the bottle, uncorked it, and poured a little of the liquid on the cotton-wool. A powerful, sweet, strange odour was diffused, and putting the lump of wadding to her lips she inhaled the strong, irritating essence till it made her cough. Then, shutting her mouth, she began to breathe it steadily in. She took long draughts of the deadly vapour, closing her eyes, and striving to quench all thought within her, to deaden all reflection and consciousness.

Her first feeling was of a certain expansion and broadening of the chest, and it seemed to her that her soul, a moment before so heavy, so weighed down with grief, was growing light, as if the burden which had crushed her had been lifted, and eased, that it had finally taken wing.

A sensation both keen and pleasant penetrated her in every limb, to the very tips of

her toes and fingers, permeated her whole body with a sort of vague intoxication and gentle fever.

She perceived that the cotton-wool was dry, and was surprised to find that she was not yet dead. She felt instead that her senses were sharpened, more subtle and alert.

She could now hear every single word spoken on the terrace. Prince Kravalow was relating how he had killed an Austrian general in a duel. And, far away in the country, she heard the noises of the night, the casual barking of a dog, the short croak of a toad, the lightest fluttering of the leaves.

She took up the bottle, again soaked the lump of cotton-wool, and again began to breathe it in. For some instants she felt nothing at all; then that slow, delightful sense of well-being which had already invaded her began again.

Twice she poured chloroform on the cotton-wool, greedy now for this strange mental and physical sensation, this dreamy torpor in which her soul was wandering. She felt as if she had no longer bones and flesh, legs and arms; all seemed to have gently vanished without her noticing. The chloroform had spirited away her body, leaving her brain more alert, alive, spacious, and free than it had ever felt before. She remembered a thousand things she had forgotten, details of her childhood,

trifles that had pleased her. Her spirit, gifted suddenly with incredible activity, leaped far and wide from one strange notion to another, rambled through a thousand adventures, roamed in the past, strayed among happy plans for the future. And her busy, careless thoughts gave her a sensuous delight; she felt a divine joy in dreaming like that.

All the time she could hear those voices, but no longer distinguished words, which seemed indeed to have taken new meanings. She had wandered deep into a sort of weird and ever-changing fairy land. She was on a great boat, passing through beautiful country all covered with flowers. She saw people on the bank who were talking loudly, and she found herself on shore without knowing or caring how she had come there. Servigny, dressed as a prince, had come to take her to a bull-fight.

The streets were full of passers-by, all talking, and she listened to their conversation without surprise — they seemed all to be acquaintances, for throughout her dreamy intoxication she could hear her mother's friends laughing and talking on the terrace. Then everything became vague.

She awoke, deliciously numb, and had some difficulty in recalling herself to consciousness. So she was not dead yet; but she felt so rested, so full of physical well-being and mental peace, that she was in no hurry to bring it to

an end. She longed for that state of exquisite assuagement to last for ever. Softly breathing, she gazed at the moon in front of her above the trees. Something in her soul was changed. She no longer thought as she had thought just now. The chloroform had enervated her, body and soul, smoothed away her grief, lulled to sleep her resolve to die.

Why should she not live, and be loved? Why not be happy? All things seemed possible now, and easy, and certain. Everything in life was sweet and good and lovely. But as it was needful to keep on dreaming for evermore, she poured more of this dream-water on to the wadding, and began again to breathe it in, removing the poison now and then from her nostrils, so as not to absorb too much, and die.

She gazed at the moon, and saw a face in it, a woman's face, and began again her flight among the dizzy pictures of her opium-dream. That face was wavering in the middle of the sky, and started singing, in a voice she knew well, the "Alleluia of Love." It was the Marquise who had just gone indoors, and seated herself at the piano.

Yvette had wings now. She flew through the night, the sweet, clear night, over the woods and streams. She flew with delight, opening her wings, fluttering her wings, wafted on the wind as though by caresses. She

whirled through the air, it kissed her skin, and she glided along so quick, so quick, that she had no time to see what was below, and she found herself down on the bank of a pond—a line in her hand; she was fishing.

Something dragged at the line, and she pulled it out of the water, bringing up a splendid pearl necklace which she had set her heart on having, some time ago. She was not in the least surprised at this haul, and looked at Servigny, who was seated by her side, without her knowing how he had come there; he, too, was fishing, and had just caught a wooden horse. Then, again, she had the sensation that she was waking, and heard them calling her from below.

Her mother had said, “Blow out your candle!”

Then the voice of Servigny, clear and whimsical, “Blow out your candle, Mam’zelle Yvette!”

And they all took up the chorus, “Blow out your candle, Mam’zelle Yvette!”

She poured more chloroform over the wadding, but now, wishing not to die, held it just far enough from her face to breathe the fresh air, yet to fill the room with the suffocating scent of the narcotic, for she realized that someone would come up. Lying back, as though dead, she waited.

“I’m a little uneasy!” said the Marquise;

“ that thoughtless child has gone to sleep and left her candle alight on the table. I’ll send Clémence to put it out, and shut her balcony window—it’s wide open.”

Presently the maid knocked at the door and called, “ Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle !”

She paused, and began again—“ Made-moiselle ! Mme. la Marquise wishes you to put out your candle and shut your window.”

Again Clémence waited a little, then knocked louder, and cried, “ Mademoiselle ! Made-moiselle !”

But as Yvette did not reply she went downstairs, and said to the Marquise, “ Made-moiselle must have gone to sleep ; she’s bolted her door, and I can’t wake her.”

“ But she mustn’t stay like that,” murmured Mme. Obardi.

At Servigny’s suggestion they all stood together close under the young girl’s window, and shouted in chorus, “ Hip—hip—hurrah ! Mam’zelle Yvette !”

Their loud cry rose in the quiet night, took its flight under the moon, through the clear air, away over the sleeping country, and they heard it dying in the distance, like the echo of a receding train. But there was no reply from Yvette, and the Marquise said, “ I hope there is nothing wrong with her, I’m beginning to be frightened.”

Thereupon Servigny, plucking crimson

flowers and buds from the great rose-tree growing on the wall, began throwing them up through the window into the room.

At the first that struck her, Yvette started and nearly cried out. Some dropped on her dress, some in her hair, others, flying over her head, fell right on the bed, and covered it with a rain of flowers.

Once more the Marquise called out, in a choking voice, "Come, Yvette—do answer!"

Servigny remarked: "Really, it's not natural; I'm going to climb the balcony."

But the chevalier demurred. "Allow me," he said; "that's much too great a favour—I protest; both time and place are quite too perfect, for obtaining a rendezvous."

The others, too, feeling sure the young girl was playing some joke on them, cried out: "We protest. It's a trick! He shan't go!" But the Marquise repeated uneasily: "Someone *must* go and see!" With a dramatic gesture the prince declared: "She favours the Duke; we are betrayed!"

"Let's toss who shall go!" cried the chevalier. And he drew a gold five-louis piece from his pocket.

He began with the prince.

"Tails!" said he.

It came down heads.

The prince spun the coin in turn, saying to Saval: "Your cry, sir!"

“ Heads !” said Saval.

It came down tails.

Thereupon, the prince put the same question to all the others. They all lost.

“ By Jove ! He’s cheating !” declared Servigny, with his insolent smile. He was the only one left.

The Russian placed his hand on his heart, and handed the gold piece to his rival, saying : “ Do the tossing yourself, then, my dear duke !”

Servigny took the coin and spun it, crying : “ Heads !”

It came down tails.

He bowed, and waving his hand towards the pillar of the balcony, said : “ Climb away, prince !”

But the prince looked round about him uneasily.

“ What are you looking for ?” asked the chevalier.

“ Well—er—I should like—a—a ladder !”

There was a general laugh, and Saval, coming forward, said : “ We will help you !”

“ Catch hold of the balcony !” he said, and raised the prince in his Herculean arms.

The prince at once caught hold, but Saval, letting go, left him suspended, waving his legs in space. Whereupon Servigny, seizing the limbs that were so frenziedly hunting for a resting-place, pulled at them with all his strength ; the hands gave way, and the prince

fell in a lump on to the stomach of M. de Belvigne, who was advancing to his assistance.

"Whose turn now?" asked Servigny.

But no one came forward.

"Come, Belvigne, a little pluck!"

"No, thank you, my dear fellow; I prefer my bones whole!"

"Now, chevalier, *you* ought to know how to scale a fortress!"

"I resign the post to you, my dear Duke."

"Hey—hey—I don't know that I'm so keen about it as all that!" And with a calculating eye Servigny sidled round the pillar. Then, springing, he caught hold of the balcony, raised himself by his wrists, and with a gymnastic manœuvre, surmounted the balustrade.

With noses in the air, the spectators all applauded.

He reappeared at once, crying: "Quick! quick! Yvette's unconscious!"

The Marquise screamed loudly, and flew towards the staircase. The young girl, with closed eyes, lay like one dead. In a frenzy of terror her mother came rushing in, and threw herself down close to her. "What is it? What is it?" she kept saying.

Servigny picked up the bottle of chloroform which had fallen on the floor. "She's suffocated herself," he said. Putting his ear down to her heart, he added: "But she is not

dead yet; we shall pull her round. Have you any ammonia?"

The maid repeated distractedly: "Any what, sir? What?"

"Sal volatile."

"Yes, sir."

Fetch it at once, and leave the door open, to make a draught."

The Marquise, now on her knees, sobbed: "Yvette! Yvette, my child, my little one, my child! Listen, answer me! Yvette, my child! Oh! my God! my God! What *is* the matter with her?"

The frightened men moved to and fro, some bringing water, towels, glasses and vinegar, some doing nothing.

Someone said: "She ought to be undressed!"

Half out of her senses, the Marquise tried to unfasten her daughter's clothes, but she no longer knew what she was doing—her hands trembled, all muddled and useless, and she groaned: "I—I can't, I can't!"

The maid had returned with a medicine bottle, which Servigny uncorked and half emptied over a handkerchief. He put it close under Yvette's nose, who began to choke.

"Good! She's breathing!" he said. "It'll soon be all right!" He bathed her temples, cheeks, and throat with the sharp-scented liquid; then signed to the maid to unlace her, and when there was nothing but a petticoat

left over the chemise, took her up in his arms and carried her to the bed. He quivered all over, disturbed by the contact of the half-clothed body in his embrace. When he had placed her on the bed he raised himself, very pale.

"She'll come round," he said; "it's all right!" for he had heard her steady, even breathing. But, perceiving all those men with their eyes fixed on Yvette lying on her bed, he felt a sudden spasm of jealous anger shaking him. Going up to them, he said: "Gentlemen, we're far too many in this room; kindly leave M. Saval and myself alone here, with the Marquise!"

He spoke in a dry, authoritative tone, and the others at once withdrew.

Mme. Obardi had thrown her arms around her lover, and with her face raised to his, was crying: "Save her—oh! save her!"

Meanwhile Servigny, turning round, caught sight of a letter on the table. With a quick movement he picked it up, and read the address. He understood at once, and reflected: "Perhaps the Marquise had better not know about this!" And tearing open the envelope, he ran his eyes over the two lines which it contained:

"I am dying, to keep myself an honest girl.

"YVETTE."

"Good-bye, dear mother, forgive me."

“The devil!” he thought, “this needs thinking over,” and he slipped the letter into his pocket. Coming back to the bedside, he at once realized that the young girl had regained consciousness, but from embarrassment and fear of being questioned, was ashamed to show it.

The Marquise had fallen on her knees, and was weeping, her head bowed at the foot of the bed. Suddenly, she cried: “A doctor! we must send for a doctor!”

But Servigny, who had been whispering to Saval, said: “No! it’s all right. Now, just go away for a minute, only one minute, and I promise you she shall give you a kiss when you come back!”

The baron, supporting Mme. Obardi by the arm, hurried her away.

Then Servigny, sitting down by the bedside, took Yvette’s hand, and said: “Mam’zelle, listen to me!”

She did not answer. She felt so happy, so sweetly, warmly nested, that she wished never to stir or speak again, but to stay like that for ever. An infinite well-being had come upon her, the like of which she had never felt before.

Light breaths of the mild night air, soft as velvet, kept floating in and, faintly, exquisitely, touching her face. It was a caress, like a kiss of the wind, like the slow, refreshing

whiffs from a fan made of all the leaves of the woods, and all the shadows of the night, of the river haze, and of every flower; for the roses thrown from below into her room and on to her bed, and the roses climbing up the balcony, all mingled their languorous perfume with the sane savour of the night breeze.

She drank in that sweet air, her eyes closed, her heart at rest in the still unspent dreaminess of the opium; she had no longer the faintest desire to die, but instead, a great, imperious longing to live, to be happy, no matter how—to be loved, ah!—loved!

“Mam’zelle Yvette,” repeated Servigny, “listen to me!”

She made up her mind to open her eyes. Seeing her thus reviving, he went on: “Come, come! What does all this mean?”

“I was so miserable, my poor Muscade,” she murmured.

He gave her hand a fatherly squeeze. “Well, that was a fine way out of it, wasn’t it?” he said. “Come, you’re going to promise me never to do it again?”

She gave no answer but a little sign with her head, and a smile that he felt rather than saw.

Taking from his pocket the letter he had found on the table, he asked: “Are we to show this to your mother?”

She frowned a "No."

And now he was at a loss what to say, for there seemed no way out of the situation. "My dear little soul," he murmured, "one has to put up with many very sad things. I understand your grief, and I promise you——"

"Ah! you are good——" she stammered.

They were silent. He looked at her. There was a kind of swooning tenderness in her eyes; all at once she held out her arms, as if to draw him to her. He bent over, feeling that her heart had spoken; and their lips met.

So for a long time they stayed, their eyes closed. Then, feeling that he was losing his head, he raised himself. She smiled at him now, a real smile of tenderness; and held him, with both hands on his shoulders.

"I must fetch your mother," he said.

"Wait one second, I'm so happy!" Then, after a pause, she said quite low, so low that he could hardly hear: "You *will* love me, won't you?"

He knelt by the bed, and kissed the wrist she let him hold. "I worship you," he said.

There were footsteps near the door, and he sprang up, calling out in his usual voice, with its habitual touch of irony: "You can come in. It's all over now!"

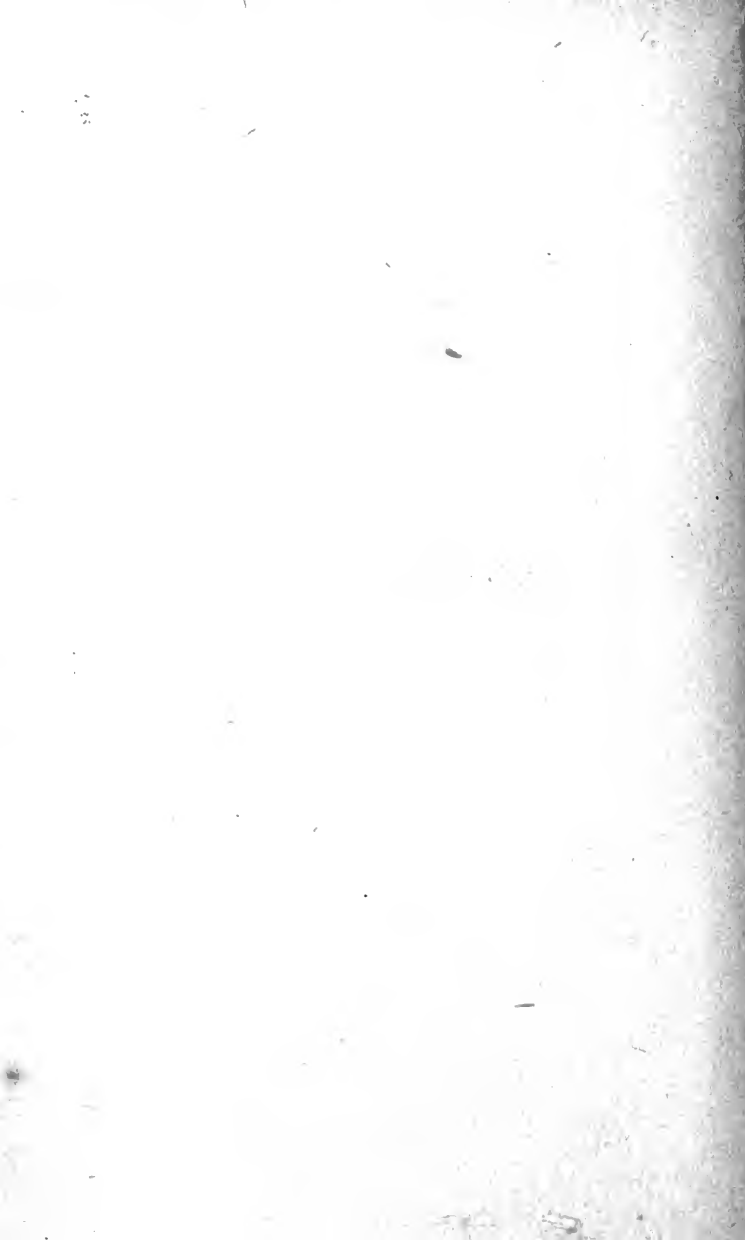
The Marquise flew to her daughter with open arms, and embraced her frantically,

covering her face with tears; while Servigny, radiant and quivering, went out on the balcony, to take deep breaths of the pure night air, humming:—

“Souvent femme varie
Bien fol est qui s’y fie!”



MADEMOISELLE FIFI



MADemoiselle FIFI

MAJOR COUNT FARLSBERG, the Prussian Commandant, was just finishing the contents of his post-bag. His back was screwed deep into a big tapestry armchair, and his booted feet rested on the elegant marble mantelpiece, where his spurs, during a three months' occupation of the chateau d'Uville, had made two deep ruts, growing a little deeper every day.

A cup of coffee was steaming on a little marqueterie table, spotted with the cigar-burns, liqueur-stains, and pen-knife cuts left by this conquering hero, who, following the dictates of idle fancy, would sometimes stop sharpening a pencil to cut-in a quaint design or perhaps a row of figures on the rich wood.

When he had finished his letters and gone through the German newspapers that his orderly had just brought in, he got up, threw on the fire some three or four immense green logs — for these gentlemen were gradually cutting down the park for their firewood—and went towards the window.

It was pouring with rain, that Normandy rain which always seems as if hurled down by a furious hand, a slanting rain, thick as a

curtain, or a diagonally striped wall; a lashing, splashing rain, drowning everything, a regular rain of Rouen, that wash-pot of all France.

The commandant looked long at the sopping lawns, then at the swollen Andelle, overflowing its banks down there below them; and while he gazed he drummed a Rhineland waltz on the window-pane. Turning, at a sound behind him, he saw his second in command, Baron Kelweingstein, now holding the rank of captain.

The major was a broad-shouldered giant, beautified by a long beard that spread fan-shaped on his chest; the whole of his tall person made one think of a peacock, a military peacock, carrying his tail unfurled from his chin. His eyes were blue, cold, and mild; and one cheek had been slashed across by a sabre in the war with Austria. He had the reputation of being a good sort and a brave soldier.

The captain, a little rubicund fellow with a big, tight-belted stomach, was not too clean-shaven, and the traces of his fiery beard and moustache, under certain conditions of light, made his face look as if it had been rubbed with phosphorus. Two teeth, lost one festive night (he never quite remembered how), made his speech thick and queer, so that he was not always to be understood. He was bald on

the top of the head only, tonsured like a priest, with a crop of short, reddish, glistening hair round that circle of bare skull.

The commandant shook hands with him, and, swallowing at a gulp his sixth cup of coffee since the morning, listened to his junior's report of the day. Then they both went back to the window, with the remark that "things were not too lively." The major, a quiet man with a wife at home, put up with the situation well enough; but the captain, a regular rake, frequenter of night clubs and of women, raged continually at being shut up for months together in the celibacy of this desolate outpost.

At a knock on the door the commandant cried, "Come in!" and a drilled puppet of a soldier appeared in the gap, announcing by his mere presence that lunch was served.

In the dining-room they found their three junior officers, Lieutenant Otto von Grössling, Second Lieutenants Fritz Scheunaburg, and the Marquis Wilhelm von Eyrik, a little blond cock-sparrow, haughty and harsh of manner, merciless towards the conquered, and as explosive as a pistol.

Since their arrival in France his comrades never called him anything but Mademoiselle Fifi, a nickname suggested by his smart appearance, his slender figure which looked as if he wore corsets, his pale face where the

budding moustache hardly showed at all, and also by reason of his new habit of continually using the French phrase, " Fi, fi donc !" pronounced with a slight hiss, to express his sovereign contempt for things and people.

The dining-room in the chateau d'Uville was a long, majestic apartment, whose mirrors of old crystal, now starred by pistol-shots, and high-hung Flemish tapestries, slashed by sabre-cuts till they drooped here and there, bore witness to the prowess of Mlle. Fifi in his hours of ease.

On the walls three family portraits—a warrior in armour, a cardinal, and a president—had long porcelain-bowled pipes thrust into their mouths, while in her ancient, faded-gold frame a noble dame, very tight-laced, sported with an air of arrogance a huge pair of blacked-on moustaches.

In this mutilated room, darkened by the storm outside, with its mournful look of defeat, and its old oak parquet floor hard now as that of a tavern, the officers lunched almost in silence.

Not till they had finished eating, and had come to spirits and tobacco, did they begin their daily lamentation on their boredom. Passing the liqueurs from hand to hand, they leaned back and sipped away, without removing from the corners of their mouths those long curved pipe-stems, with egg-shaped china

bowls daubed with little pictures in a style that could appeal only to a Hottentot.

As soon as a glass was empty it was wearily refilled. But Mlle. Fifi made a point of breaking his each time, and an orderly would at once bring him another.

Enveloped in a fog of pungent smoke, they seemed to be steeping themselves in a dreary, drowsy drunkenness, the gloomy soaking of men with nothing else to do.

But suddenly the baron, in a spasm of revolt, pulled himself together and ejaculated: "By gad! we simply can't go on like this. We must damn well invent something!"

Lieutenant Otto and Second Lieutenant Fritz, both types of the stodgy, solemn-faced young German, answered as one man: "Yes; only—what?"

The baron reflected a moment: "Well, we must get up a spree, if the colonel will let us."

The major took his pipe out of his mouth: "How do you mean—a spree?"

The baron came across to him: "You leave it all to me, sir. I'll send Old Automaton to Rouen to bring some girls out here. I know where they're to be found. We'll give 'em a supper; we can do it in great style, and we'll have a jolly good evening, for once."

Count Farlsberg smiled, and said, with a shrug of his shoulders: "You're cracked, my dear fellow."

But all the young men had got up, and came crowding round the commandant, adding their entreaties. "Oh, do let him, sir! It's so infernally dull here."

"All right!" said the major, giving in at last. And at once the baron sent for Old Automaton—a veteran who had never been seen to smile, but who could be relied on to carry out fanatically any order given by his officers. This veritable ramrod of a man received the baron's instructions without moving a muscle of his face, and left the room. Five minutes later a military waggon, with a hooped canvas cover, went rattling off through the furious rain behind four horses at full gallop.

And at once a thrill of reviving animation went stealing through their spirits; they lounged no more, their faces brightened, and conversation flowed.

Although the rain continued to come down with unabated fury, the major swore that the clouds were not so heavy, and Lieutenant Otto affirmed that it was certainly going to clear. As for Mlle. Fifi, he simply could not keep still, fidgeting up and down, and searching with his clear hard eyes for something to break. They lighted suddenly on the moustachioed lady. Drawing out his revolver, the blond young beast remarked: "*You're not going to look on, though!*"

and, without getting up, he fired, putting out the portrait's eyes with two consecutive shots.

Then he called out: "Let's play the mine game!" And instantly all conversation ceased, under the spell of this new and powerful attraction. The mine game was entirely Mlle. Fifi's invention, his pet amusement for gratifying his genius for destruction.

The owner of the chateau, Count Fernand d'Amoys d'Uville, had left in too great haste to be able to take away or hide anything except the silver, which had been stowed away in a hole in the wall. The great salon, opening into the dining-room, of this very rich and lordly person, had, up to the moment of his precipitate flight, presented the appearance of a museum gallery.

The walls of the vast room were garnished with pictures, drawings, and valuable water-colours. On the tables, shelves, and in elegant cabinets a thousand knickknacks were arranged—Chinese vases, statuettes, Dresden shepherds, oriental monsters, old ivories, and Venetian glass—a perfect medley of rare and precious stuff.

There was little left of it all by now. Not that there had been any looting. Major Count Farlsberg would by no means have permitted that, but from time to time Mlle. Fifi played the mine game, and on such occasions at any

rate all the officers were thoroughly amused for full five minutes.

The little marquis went off to the salon for what he needed, and came back with a very charming little porcelain teapot, *Famille Rose*. Filling it with gunpowder, he delicately inserted down the spout a long piece of tinder, lighted it, and ran back with his infernal machine into the next room.

He returned with remarkable celerity, and shut the door. And all the Germans waited, stiff with expectation and curious childlike smiles. The moment the explosion came off, shaking the whole chateau, they all darted together into the salon.

Mlle. Fifi, the first in, was clapping his hands ecstatically before a terra-cotta Venus, whose head had been blown off at last. They all proceeded to pick up fragments of porcelain, admiring the strange lacework of the splinters, examining the latest havoc, and disclaiming for to-day certain ravages undoubtedly done in the previous explosion; while the major, with a fatherly air, contemplated the splendid room thus spificated by that Neronic bomb, and sanded with the smithereens of Art. He was the first to retire, remarking genially: "It was a great success, this time!"

But such a smother of smoke had got into the dining-room, mingling with the tobacco

fumes, that it was impossible to breathe. The commandant opened the window, and all the officers, who had returned for a last liqueur of brandy, gathered round it.

The damp air drew in, with its scent of flooded country; a powdering of rain pearly their beards. They could see the great trees bending under the storm, the broad valley half hidden beneath a mist of dark, low-hanging clouds, and in the far distance the belfry of the church, a grey point piercing the downpour.

Since their coming its bell had never rung. This was the sole resistance the invaders had met with in those parts—this of the church bell. The priest had not refused to billet Prussian soldiers, had even accepted invitations to drink beer or wine with the hostile commandant, who often made use of him as a friendly intermediary; but it was no good asking him to have the church bell rung; he would sooner have let himself be shot. It was his way of protesting against the invasion, a peaceful, silent protest, the only one that in his view befitted a priest, a man of peace, not war; and everybody, for ten miles round, lauded the steady heroism of the Abbé Chantavoine, who dared thus to proclaim the national grief by the stubborn muteness of his church bell. The whole village, fired by this resistance, were ready to back up their pastor

through thick and thin, to face anything, considering that by this tacit protest they held the national honour safe. It seemed to the peasants that they had deserved better of their country than Belfort or Strasbourg, that they had shown as fine an example, that the name of their hamlet was earning immortality. Apart from this, they refused nothing to their Prussian conquerors.

The commandant and his junior officers had many a laugh over this harmless courage, and since the whole countryside showed itself obliging and submissive, they tolerated that mute exhibition of patriotism quite cheerfully.

The little Marquis Wilhelm, alone, wanted badly to make the church bell ring. The politic condescension of his chief towards the priest enraged him, and every day he besought the commandant to let him make "Ding-don-don" just once, only once, just for a joke. And he would put a feline grace into his begging, and use the dulcet tones of some wheedling minx crazy for the gratification of her whim. But Count Farlsberg was adamant, and Mlle. Fifi had to console himself by playing the mine game in the Chateau d'Uville.

The five men stayed some minutes at the window, inhaling the damp air, till Lieutenant Fritz said, with a thick laugh: "These young ladies haven't much of a day for their outing."

On that they separated, going to their various duties, the captain having a lot to do in preparation for the dinner.

When they met again at dusk they all burst out laughing, so smart and glossy were they all, so perfumed and pomaded, as if just starting off to a review. The commandant's hair seemed less grey than in the morning; the captain had shaved, keeping only his moustache—a veritable flame beneath his nose.

In spite of the rain they left the window open, and every now and then one of them would go and listen. At ten minutes past six the baron announced a distant rumbling; they all rushed to the door. Very soon the waggon came dashing up, with its four horses still at a gallop, muddied up to their eyes, blown, and steaming.

Five ladies alighted at the front-door, five good-looking damsels, carefully picked out by a friend of the captain, to whom Old Automaton had taken a private note from the baron.

Not that the ladies had made any bones about it, sure of good terms, and having three months' experience now of the Prussians. They had to take men and things as they found them. "It's all in the day's work," they said to each other during the drive, by way of stilling any remaining pricks of conscience.

They all went at once into the dining-room. Lighted up it looked more lugubrious than ever in its pitiful dilapidation, and the table, loaded with viands and the fine dinner service, as well as the silver rescued from that wall where the owner had hidden it, made one think of a brigand's supper, set after a successful raid. The captain, in his element, took charge of the ladies, past master of the art as he was, scrutinizing and appraising their charms; and when the three younger men showed signs of pairing off, he jumped on them at once, undertaking the work of partition himself, so that the strict demands of hierarchy might be properly fulfilled.

In order to avoid all discussion, dispute, suspicion of partiality, he lined the ladies up according to their height, and, addressing the tallest in the tone of a colonel on parade, asked: "Your name?"

"Pamela," she answered, making her voice as manly as she could.

"No. 1, name of Pamela, allotted to the commandant."

Having kissed Blondine, the second, in token of proprietorship, he assigned the chubby Amanda to Lieutenant Otto, the auburn-haired Eva to Second Lieutenant Fritz, and the shortest of all, Rachel, a dark and very young Jewess with eyes as black as ink (whose upturned nose proved the rule, among her

race, of turned-down noses), he gave to the youngest officer, the little Marquis Wilhelm von Eyrik.

All, moreover, were plump and pretty, though without much distinction of feature, being reduced to somewhat the same pattern in style and complexion by the conditions of their life.

The three young men were for taking their ladies to have a wash and brush-up, but the captain, in his wisdom, was against that. They did not need it, in his opinion, and it would certainly lead to confusion. His ruling as a man of great experience was adopted. So there was only a certain amount of osculation.

All of a sudden Rachel began choking, and coughing till the tears came into her eyes, and the smoke out of her nostrils. The marquis, under pretext of a kiss, had puffed tobacco-smoke into her mouth. She showed no temper, and did not say a word, but she fixed her dark eyes on that young man; in the depths of them anger had begun to glow.

They sat down to dinner. Even the commandant appeared enraptured; he had on his right Pamela, and on his left Blondine. As he unfolded his napkin, he remarked: "Really a splendid idea of yours, captain!"

Lieutenants Otto and Fritz, as polite as if to women of their own class, were a little alarming to their neighbours; but Baron

Kelweingstein, at the top of his form, was positively sparkling and bubbling with jokes, while his red head seemed to be in flames. He made himself extremely gallant in French as spoken on the Rhine, and his coarse compliments, hurled through the gap left by the departure of those two teeth, reached the ladies amid volleys of saliva. They were far from understanding a word of what he said, and only became animated as his talk became more gross, full of allusions, murdered by his vile accent. Then, indeed, they went into fits of laughter, leaning across their neighbours and repeating to each other lubricities that the baron now purposely mispronounced for the pleasure of hearing them respoken. The wine had not been long in going to the girls' heads, and they were soon behaving after their kind, playing with the moustaches to right and left, squeezing the men's arms, drinking out of everyone's glass, singing French ditties and tags of German songs learned in their daily encounters with the enemy.

Soon the men, too, began to play the fool, shouting and smashing the crockery, while the soldier servants behind their backs, perfectly impassive, went on serving.

The commandant alone maintained a certain dignity.

Mlle. Fifi had taken Rachel on his knee, and with a sort of cold fury began to kiss the

little dark hairs curling on her neck, and to breathe her in luxuriously. Then he would pinch her through her thin dress hard enough to make her cry out; for he was perpetually driven by a longing to hurt something. Once in the middle of a long kiss he suddenly bit her lip so severely that blood trickled down her chin on to her bodice.

Again she looked at him fixedly, and murmured, as she dabbed the wound: "You'll have to pay for that!"

"All right," he said, with a harsh laugh, "I'll pay!"

They were at dessert by now, and champagne was being served. The commandant rose, and in a tone he might have used for proposing the health of the Empress Augusta, called out: "I give you—the health of the ladies!"

After that came a stream of tipsy toasts, jocular and gross, and all the worse for the bad French in which they were proposed. One after another the young men got up, trying to be funny; while the ladies, very far gone by now, with vacant eyes and loosened mouths, applauded wildly. Then the captain, in a supreme effort to be gallant, raised his glass once more, and said: "To our conquests of the fair!"

At that Lieutenant Otto, a regular Black Forest bear, drew himself up, and in a sudden

heat of tipsy patriotism, cried: "To our conquest of France!"

Intoxicated though they were, the girls were suddenly silent; but Rachel, turning to him, stammered out in her rage: "You—you—I know some Frenchmen you wouldn't dare say that to!"

The little marquis, who still held her on his knee, began to laugh. "Ha! ha! I've never seen a Frenchman. As soon as we show ourselves they cut and run!"

"You beast! You liar!" the infuriated girl shouted in his face.

He looked at her for a second much as he had looked at the portraits before putting their eyes out with his bullets, then said mockingly: "Well, that's a brilliant thing to say! Should we be here if they were any good?" And with sudden exultation he shouted out: "We're their masters. France is ours!"

She jerked herself off his knee back on to her own chair. And he got up, stretching out his wineglass over the table, and shouted again: "France is ours, and the French; and the woods, and the fields, and the homes of France!"

And all the others, in a burst of drunken brutal ardour, lifted their glasses, and shouting, "Prussia for ever!" emptied them at a gulp.

Dumbed with a sudden fear the girls made no protest; even Rachel was silent.

The little marquis filled up his glass, and placing it on her dark head, went on: "And ours, too, every woman of France!"

She started up; the glass, tilting over, baptized her black hair with its golden wine, and broke on the floor. Her lips trembled, her eyes defied his mocking eyes, and in a voice choking with rage she stammered out: "That's—that's not true! You'll never have the women of France!"

He laughed so that he fell back into his chair. And aping as best he could the true Parisian accent, he said: "She's killing, she really is! What have you come here for, then, my dear?"

She was silent a moment, too wildly upset to take in these last words. Then, suddenly catching on to his meaning, she flung out furiously: "I! I! I'm not a woman, I'm only a—a—slut! That's good enough for a Prussian!"

Before she had finished he caught her a swinging box on the ear; but just as he was raising his hand again, blind with rage, she seized a little silver dessert-knife from the table, and, so quickly that no one saw it done, drove the point right into his throat just where it joined the chest.

The word he was saying was cut in half

within his windpipe; his mouth fell open, his eyes gave one horrified look.

In confusion everyone jumped up, shouting; but, hurling her chair at the legs of Lieutenant Otto, who fell over it full-length, she flew to the window, threw it open, and, before anyone could reach her, vanished into the darkness and the rain that was still falling.

In two minutes Mlle. Fifi was dead. Fritz and Otto drew their swords and were for massacring the women, who were clinging round their knees. With difficulty the major prevented this butchery, and getting the four terrified girls into another room, put a guard of two soldiers over them. Then, as if marshalling his forces for a battle, he organized the pursuit of the fugitive, quite certain of recapturing her.

Fifty men, spurred on by threats, were set to scour the park, two hundred more to search the woods and every house in the valley.

The table, cleared in a second, was now serving for a death-bed, and the four officers, stern and sobered, with the rigid faces of soldiers on duty, posted themselves at the windows, and peered forth into the night.

Torrents of rain were still coming down. An unending clamour filled the darkness, the whispering hiss of falling water and flowing water, of water trickling down, and water splashing up from the ground.

Suddenly a shot rang out, then another, very distant; and from time to time, for full four hours, they kept hearing shots, now near, now far, and voices hailing, and calling out queer guttural words.

At dawn the soldiers came back. Two had been killed, three others wounded by their comrades in the ardour of the chase and the scared confusion of that night pursuit. But they had not caught Rachel.

From that time on the inhabitants were terrorized, their houses turned upside down, the whole valley quartered, and searched again and again. The Jewess seemed to have left not a trace of her flight.

The general, who had to be told, ordered the whole affair to be hushed up, so as not to set a bad example to the army, and he severely dropped on the commandant, who in turn took it out of his juniors. "We don't make war," the general had said, "for the pleasure of kissing courtesans." And Count Farnsberg, in exasperation, resolved to avenge himself upon the countryside.

Thinking out a plausible pretext for severity, he sent for the priest, and ordered him to toll the church bell for the funeral of the Marquis von Eyrik.

Contrary to all expectation, the priest promised, with the utmost docility, to comply. And when the body of Mlle. Fifi, carried by

soldiers, preceded, surrounded, and followed by soldiers with loaded rifles, set out from the Chateau d'Uville, on its way to the cemetery, the bell at last regained its voice, tolling out a funeral knell, but with a certain mirth, as if some loving hand were stroking it.

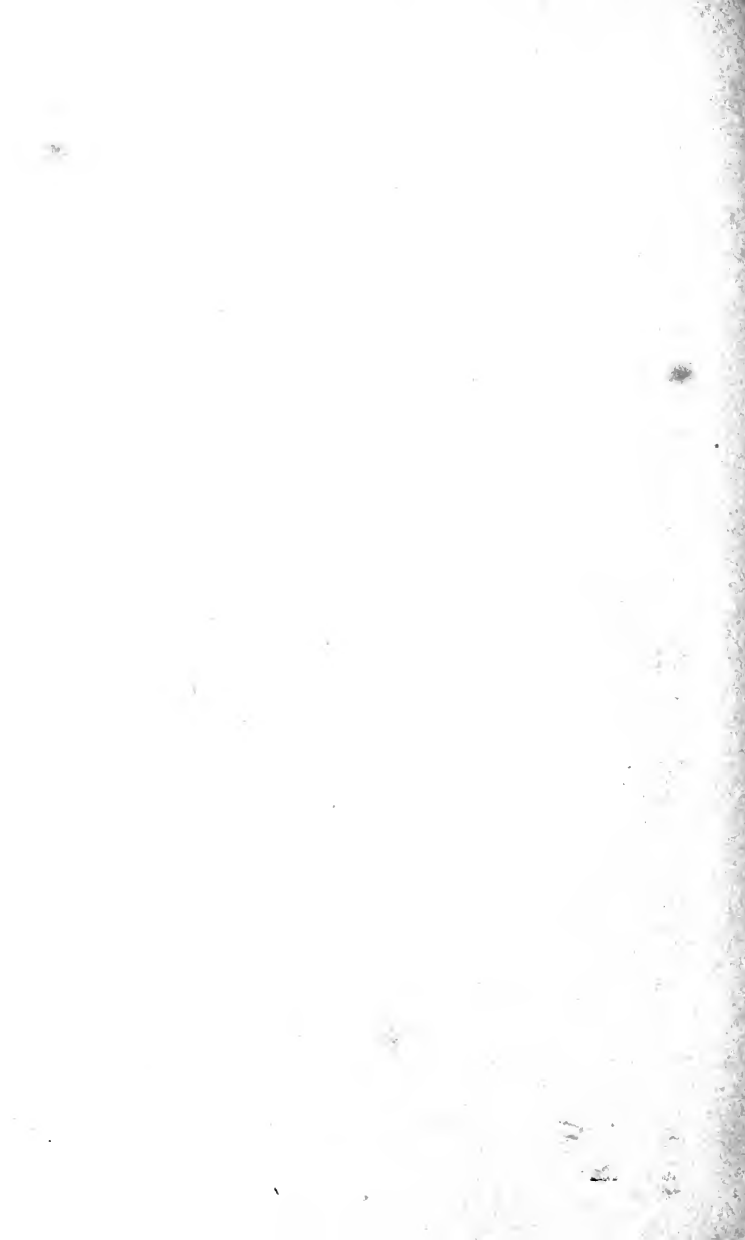
It rang again in the evening, and the next day, and every day; it chimed as often as heart could wish. Sometimes even during the night it began of itself just shaking out into the darkness two or three silvery gay notes inexplicably. The peasants of the neighbourhood declared it was bewitched, and none but the priest and the sacristan would now go near the belfry.

In truth, a poor girl was living up there, lonely and anxious, secretly looked after by those two men.

So she stayed, till the German troops departed. Then one evening, the priest, having borrowed the baker's char-à-banc, himself drove his prisoner to the gate of Rouen. When he had embraced her, she jumped out and made her way quickly to the house she belonged to, where they had long given her up for dead.

Some time afterwards a patriot, who had no prejudices, took her away from there; he loved her first for her fine deed, but later for herself. And marrying her, he made of her a Lady as good as many another.

TWO FRIENDS



TWO FRIENDS

PARIS was blockaded, famished, at the last gasp. Sparrows were scarce on the roofs, and the sewers depleted of their rats. Every mortal thing was being eaten.

Strolling sadly along the outer boulevard on a fine January morning, with his hands in the pockets of his military trousers, and his stomach empty, M. Morissot, a watchmaker by profession, and a man of his ease when he had the chance, caught sight of a friend, and stopped. This was M. Sauvage, an acquaintance he had made out fishing.

For before the war Morissot had been in the habit of starting out at dawn every Sunday, rod in hand, and a tin box on his back. He would take the train to Argenteuil, get out at Colombes, then go on foot as far as the Island of Marante. The moment he reached this Elysium of his dreams he would begin to fish, and fish till night. Every Sunday he met there a little round and jovial man, this M. Sauvage, a haberdasher of Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, also a perfect fanatic at fishing. They would often pass half the day side by side, rod in hand, feet dangling above the

stream, and in this manner had become fast friends. Some days they did not talk, other days they did. But they understood each other admirably without words, for their tastes and feelings were identical.

On spring mornings, about ten o'clock, when the young sun was raising a faint mist above the quiet-flowing river, and blessing the backs of those two passionate fishermen with a pleasant warmth, Morissot would murmur to his neighbour: "I say, isn't it heavenly?" and M. Sauvage would reply: "Couldn't be jollier!" It was quite enough to make them understand and like each other.

Or in autumn, towards sunset, when the blood-red sky and crimson clouds were reflected in the water, the whole river stained with colour, the horizon flaming, when our two friends looked as red as fire, and the trees, already russet and shivering at the touch of winter, were turned to gold, M. Sauvage would look smilingly at Morissot, and remark: "What a sight!" and Morissot, not taking his eyes off his float, would reply ecstatically: "Bit better than it is in town, eh?"

* * * *

Having made sure of each other, they shook hands heartily, quite moved at meeting again in such different circumstances. M. Sauvage, heaving a sigh, murmured: "Nice state of things!" Morissot, very gloomy, quavered

out: "And what weather! To-day's the first fine day this year!"

The sky was indeed quite blue and full of light.

They moved on, side by side, ruminative, sad. Morissot pursued his thought: "And fishing, eh? What jolly times we used to have!"

"Ah!" muttered M. Sauvage. "When shall we go fishing again?"

They entered a little café, took an absinthe together, and started off once more, strolling along the pavement.

Suddenly Morissot halted: "Another nip?" he said.

"Right-o!" responded M. Sauvage. And in they went to another wine-shop. They came out rather light-headed, affected by so much alcohol on their starving stomachs. The day was mild, and a soft breeze caressed their faces.

M. Sauvage, to whose light-headedness this warmth was putting the finishing touch, stopped short: "I say—suppose we go!"

"What d'you mean?"

"Fishing!"

"Where?"

"Why, at our island. The French outposts are close to Colombes. I know Colonel Dumoulin; he'll be sure to let us pass."

Morissot answered, quivering with eager-

ness: "All right; I'm on!" And they parted, to get their fishing gear.

An hour later they were marching along the highroad. They came presently to the villa occupied by the Colonel, who, much amused by their whim, gave them leave. And furnished with his permit, they set off again.

They soon passed the outposts, and, traversing the abandoned village of Colombes, found themselves at the edge of the little vineyard fields that run down to the Seine. It was about eleven o'clock.

The village of Argenteuil, opposite, seemed quite deserted. The heights of Orgemont and Sannois commanded the whole countryside; the great plain stretching to Nanterre was empty, utterly empty of all but its naked cherry-trees and its grey earth.

M. Sauvage jerking his thumb towards the heights, muttered: "The Prussians are up there!" And disquietude stole into the hearts of the two friends, looking at that deserted land. The Prussians! They had never seen any, but they had felt them there for months, all round Paris, bringing ruin to France, bringing famine; pillaging, massacring; invisible, yet invincible. And a sort of superstitious terror went surging through their hatred for this unknown and victorious race.

Morissot stammered: "I say—suppose we were to meet some?"

With that Parisian jocularly which nothing can repress M. Sauvage replied: "We'd give 'em some fried fish."

None the less, daunted by the silence all round, they hesitated to go further.

At last M. Sauvage took the plunge. "Come on! But we must keep our eyes skinned!"

They got down into a vineyard, where they crept along, all eyes and ears, bent double, taking cover behind every bush.

There was still a strip of open ground to cross before they could get to the riverside; they took it at the double, and the moment they reached the bank plumped down amongst some osiers.

Morissot glued his ear to the ground for any sound of footsteps. Nothing! They were alone, utterly alone.

They plucked up spirit again, and began to fish.

In front of them the Island of Marante, uninhabited, hid them from the far bank. The little island restaurant was closed, and looked as if it had been abandoned for years.

M. Sauvage caught the first gudgeon, Morissot the second, and every minute they kept pulling in their lines with a little silvery creature wriggling at the end. Truly a miraculous draught of fishes!

They placed their spoil carefully in a very fine-meshed net suspended in the water at their

feet, and were filled by the delicious joy that visits those who know once more a pleasure of which they have been deprived too long.

The good sun warmed their shoulders; they heard nothing, thought of nothing, were lost to the world. They fished.

But suddenly a dull boom, which seemed to come from underground, made the earth tremble. The bombardment had begun again.

Morissot turned his head. Away above the bank he could see on the left the great silhouette of Mont Valerien, showing a white plume high up—an ashy puff just belched forth. Then a second spurt of smoke shot up from the fort's summit, and some seconds afterwards was heard the roar of the gun.

Then more and more. Every minute the hill shot forth its deadly breath, sighed out milky vapours that rose slowly to the calm heaven, and made a crown of cloud.

M. Sauvage shrugged his shoulders. "At it again!" he said.

Morissot, who was anxiously watching the bobbing of his float, was seized with the sudden fury of a man of peace against these maniacs battering at each other, and he growled out: "Idiots I call them, killing each other like that!"

"Worse than the beasts!" said M. Sauvage.

And Morissot, busy with a fish, added:

“ It'll always be like that, in my opinion, so long as we have governments.”

M. Sauvage cut him short. “ The Republic would never have declared war——”

Morissot broke in: “ Under a monarchy you get war against your neighbours; under a republic—war amongst yourselves.”

And they began tranquilly discussing and unravelling momentous political problems with the common sense of two gentle, narrow creatures, who agreed at any rate on this one point, that Man would never be free.

And Mont Valerien thundered without ceasing, shattering with its shells the homes of France, pounding out life, crushing human beings, putting an end to many a dream, to many a longed-for joy, to many a hoped-for happiness; opening everywhere, too, in the hearts of wives, of girls, of mothers, wounds that would never heal

“ That's life !” declared M. Sauvage.

“ I should call it death,” said Morissot, and laughed.

They both gave a sudden start; there was surely someone coming up behind them. Turning their eyes they saw, standing close to their very elbows, four men, four big bearded men, dressed in a sort of servant's livery, with flat caps on their heads, pointing rifles at them.

The rods fell from their hands and floated off down-stream.

In a few seconds they were seized, bound, thrown into a boat, and taken over to the island.

Behind the house that they had thought deserted they perceived some twenty German soldiers.

A sort of hairy giant, smoking a great porcelain pipe, and sitting astride of a chair, said in excellent French: "Well, gentlemen, what luck fishing?"

Whereupon a soldier laid at his officer's feet the net full of fish, which he had carefully brought along.

The Prussian smiled. "I see—not bad. But we've other fish to fry. Now listen to me, and keep cool. I regard you two as spies sent to watch me. I take you, and I shoot you. You were pretending to fish, the better to disguise your plans. You've fallen into my hands; so much the worse for you. That's war. But, seeing that you passed through your outposts, you must assuredly have been given the password to get back again. Give it me, and I'll let you go."

Livid, side by side, the two friends were silent, but their hands kept jerking with little nervous movements.

The officer continued: "No one will ever know; it will be all right; you can go home quite easy in your minds. If you refuse, it's death—instant death. Choose."

They remained motionless, without a word.

The Prussian, calm as ever, stretched out his hand towards the water, and said: "Think! In five minutes you'll be at the bottom of that river. In five minutes. You've got families, I suppose?"

Mont Valerien went on thundering. The two fishermen stood there silent.

The German gave an order in his own language. Then he moved his chair so as not to be too near his prisoners. Twelve men came forward, took their stand twenty paces away, and grounded arms.

The officer said: "I give you one minute; not a second more."

And, getting up abruptly, he approached the two Frenchmen, took Morissot by the arm, and, drawing him aside, whispered: "Quick, that password. Your friend need never know. It will only look as if I'd relented." Morissot made no answer.

Then the Prussian took M. Sauvage apart, and asked him the same question.

M. Sauvage did not reply.

Once again they were side by side. The officer gave a word of command. The soldiers raised their rifles.

At that moment Morissot's glance lighted on the net full of gudgeons lying on the grass a few paces from him. The sunshine was falling on that glittering heap of fishes, still

full of life. His spirit sank. In spite of all effort his eyes filled with tears.

“ Adieu, M. Sauvage !” he stammered out.

M. Sauvage answered: “ Adieu, M. Morissot.”

They grasped each others hands, shaken from head to foot by a trembling that they could not control.

“ Fire !” cried the officer.

Twelve shots rang out as one.

M. Sauvage fell forward like a log. Morissot, the taller, wavered, spun round, and came down across his comrade, his face upturned to the sky ; blood spurted from his tunic, torn across the chest.

The German gave another order. His men dispersed. They came back with ropes and stones, which they fastened to the feet of the two dead friends, whom they carried to the river bank. And Mont Valerien never ceased rumbling, crowned now with piled-up clouds of smoke.

Two of the soldiers took Morissot by the head and heels, two others laid hold of M. Sauvage. The bodies, swung violently to and fro, were hurled forward, described a curve, then plunged upright into the river, where the stones dragged them down feet first.

The water splashed up, bubbled, wrinkled, then fell calm again, and tiny waves rippled out towards the banks.

A few bloodstains floated away out there.

The officer, calm as ever, said quietly: "It's the fish who've got the luck now!" and went back towards the house.

But suddenly catching sight of the net full of gudgeons on the grass, he took it up, looked it over, smiled, and called out: "Wilhelm!"

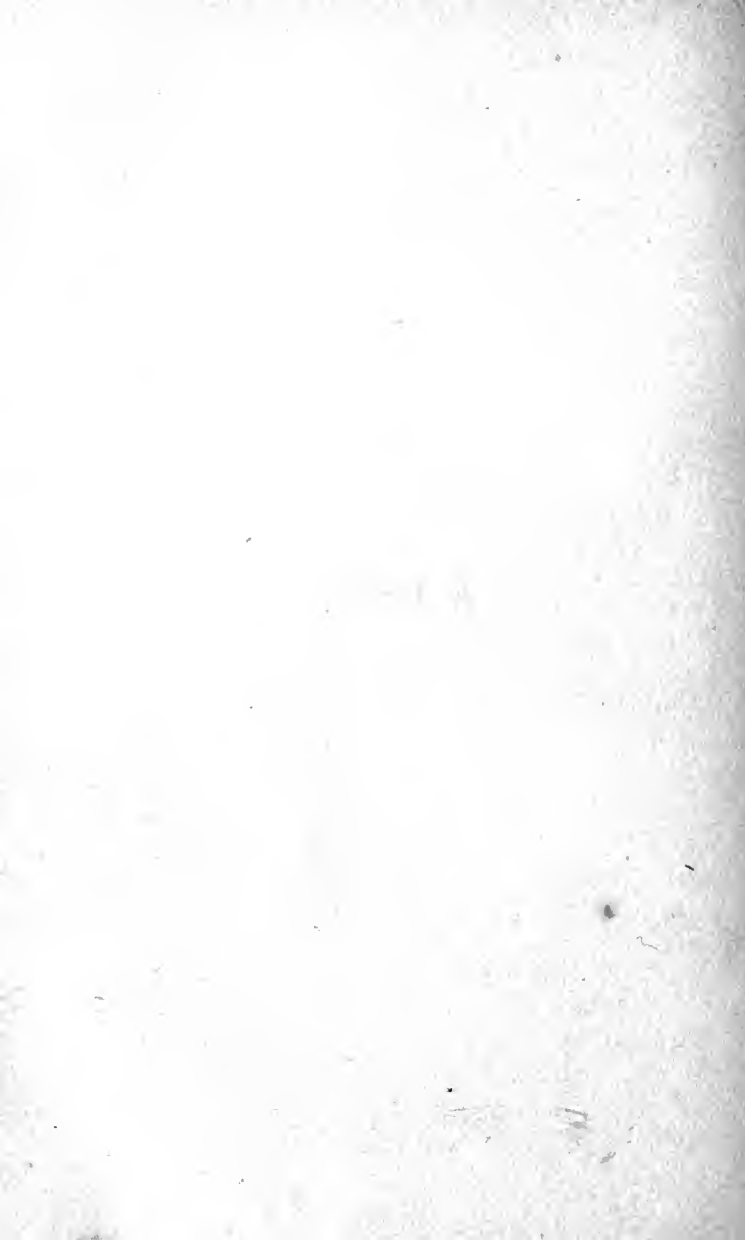
A soldier in a white apron came running up. The Prussian threw him the spoil of the two dead fishermen.

"Get these little affairs fried at once while they're still alive. First-rate like that!"

And he went back to his pipe.



A DUEL



A DUEL

THE war was over; the Germans occupied all France; the country was gasping like a defeated wrestler beneath the victor's knee.

Out from starving, terrified, despairing Paris the first trains had begun to run again, towards new frontiers, slowly traversing the country and wayside towns. The first passengers were gazing out at the devastated plains and the burnt villages. In front of the doors of such houses as still stood, Prussian soldiers with copper-spiked black helmets sat straddling across chairs, smoking their pipes. Others were working or chatting, as if they were in the bosoms of their families. Whole regiments could be seen manœuvring on the open spaces of such towns as were passed, and now and then, above the rattling of the train, raucous voices could be heard shouting out words of command.

M. Dubuis, who had served in the Garde Nationale throughout the siege of Paris, was on his way to Switzerland, to rejoin his wife and daughter, whom he had prudently sent abroad before the invasion.

Famine and fatigue had failed to reduce the bulk of this rich and peaceable merchant. He had lived through terrible things with a sort of broken-hearted resignation and many a bitter comment on the savagery of Man. Now that the war was at an end and he was about to cross the frontier, he was seeing the Prussians for the first time, although he had taken duty on the ramparts and mounted guard many a cold night.

He looked with timid anger at these bearded and armed men, installed on the soil of France as if it were their home; he felt within his soul a fever of impotent patriotism, struggling with an insistent need for prudence—that new instinct, as it were, which has never left us since.

In his compartment two Englishmen, come over to have a look at things, were gazing out with eyes of placid curiosity. They, too, were stout, both of them, and talked together in their own tongue, sometimes quoting paragraphs out loud from their guide-book, in their endeavours to identify the places spoken of therein.

The train having stopped at the station of a little town, a Prussian officer suddenly got in, his sword clattering after him on the carriage steps. He was tall, buttoned tight in his uniform, and bearded up to the eyes. His red hair seemed to blaze, and his long

moustaches, of a paler hue, swept out to either side, cutting his face in twain.

The Englishmen set to work at once to gaze at him, with smiles of gratified curiosity, while M. Dubuis pretended to read his newspaper, tucked away in his corner like a thief in presence of a policeman.

The train went on again. The Englishmen continued to talk, and hunt out the exact sites of battlefields. Suddenly, as one of them was pointing to a village on the horizon, the Prussian officer, stretching out his long legs and lounging back in his seat, remarked in his peculiar French:

“ I killed twelve Frenchmen in that village. I took more than a hundred prisoners.”

The Englishmen, thoroughly interested, asked at once:

“ Ah ! What’s it called—that village ?”

“ Pharsbourg,” replied the Prussian; and he went on: “ I caught ’em by the ears, those rascally Frenchmen.”

Then, looking at M. Dubuis, he laughed provocatively. The train rolled on and on, through villages full of the enemy. There were German soldiers on the roads, in the fields, standing at the level crossings, or chatting in front of cafés. They covered the earth like a swarm of African locusts.

The officer waved his hand.

“ If I’d been in command I’d have taken

Paris and burnt it down, and killed the lot of 'em. No more France !”

Out of politeness, the Englishmen replied :

“ Er—ye-es !”

“ In twenty years' time,” continued the Prussian, “ the whole of Europe will belong to us—the whole. Prussia is the greatest Power in the world.”

The Englishmen, somewhat uneasy, did not answer. Their faces, inscrutable now, seemed made of wax, between their long whiskers. The Prussian officer laughed. Still lounging back in his seat, he began to boast. He boasted of the crushing of France, insulting the fallen enemy; jeering at Austria's recent defeat, jeering at the desperate, futile defence made by the French provinces, jeering at the *garde mobile*, at the useless artillery. He announced that Bismarck was going to build a town of iron with the guns taken. And suddenly he put his boots against the thigh of M. Dubuis, who, reddening to the ears, turned his eyes away.

The Englishmen seemed to have become totally oblivious, as if they were once more back in their own island, shut away from the sounds of this world.

The officer took out his pipe, and, looking hard at the Frenchman, said :

“ Have you got some tobacco about you ?”

M. Dubuis replied :

“ No, monsieur.”

The German went on :

“ I beg you will go and buy me some when the train stops.” And laughing again, he added: “ I’ll give you something for yourself.”

The train whistled, slackened, passed the burnt-out buildings of a station, and stopped.

The German opened the carriage door, and, taking M. Dubuis by the arm, said :

“ Go, and do what I tell you ! Hurry up !”

A guard of Prussian soldiers occupied the station. Others stood looking on behind the wooden railings. Just as the engine was whistling for departure, M. Dubuis shot out on to the platform, and, in spite of the gesticulations of the station-master, dashed into another compartment.

* * * * *

He was alone there ! He mopped his forehead, and opened his waistcoat, for his heart was beating hard, and he was out of breath. The train stopped again at a station. The officer appeared suddenly at the carriage door and got in, followed almost at once by the two Englishmen, spurred on by their curiosity. The German seated himself opposite the Frenchman, and said with his laugh :

“ So you didn’t want to do my commission ?”

M. Dubuis replied :

“ No, monsieur.”

The train had just started again.

“ Well,” said the officer, “ I’ll just cut off your moustache to fill my pipe.”

And he put out his hand towards his neighbour’s face. The Englishmen, unmoved as ever, stared with round eyes. The German had already taken hold of some hairs and was pulling at them, when M. Dubuis, with a backhander, knocked up his arm, and, seizing him by the collar, flung him down on the seat. Then, mad with rage, the veins in his temples swollen, and his eyes blood-shot, he squeezed the German’s throat steadily with one hand, while, with the other, clenched, he smote him in the face. The Prussian struggled, tried to draw his sword, to catch hold of his adversary, recumbent upon him. But M. Dubuis kept him down with the weight of his vast body, and smote, smote without ceasing, without taking breath, without knowing where his blows were falling. Blood flowed; the throttled German gasped, spat out teeth, and went on trying, but vainly, to throw off this huge infuriated man who was beating him to death.

The Englishmen had risen from their seats and closed in to get a better view; and there they stood, full of delighted curiosity, ready to make any sort of bet on the event.

But suddenly M. Dubuis, exhausted by that

terrific effort, raised himself and sat down without a word.

The Prussian was too bewildered, too paralyzed with astonishment and pain, to hurl himself on his opponent. But the moment he had recovered his breath, he said:

“If you don't give me satisfaction in a duel, I'll kill you.”

“When you like,” replied M. Dubuis; “I ask nothing better.”

The German continued:

“Here's Strasbourg; I'll find two officers for seconds; I've just time before the train goes on.”

M. Dubuis, who was puffing almost as much as the locomotive, said to the Englishmen:

“Will you be my seconds?”

They replied, as one man:

“Oh, yes!”

And the train stopped.

In a minute the Prussian had found two comrades, who provided the pistols, and a start was made for the ramparts.

The Englishmen were continually looking at their watches, hurrying on, and urging forward the preliminaries, very anxious not to miss their train.

M. Dubuis had never handled a pistol in his life. They placed him twenty paces from his opponent, and asked him:

“Are you ready?”

As he replied "Yes," he noticed that one of the Englishmen had opened his umbrella to protect himself against the sun.

A voice said: "Fire!"

And M. Dubuis fired, anyhow, immediately, and with stupefaction saw the Prussian opposite him stagger, raise his arms, and fall like a log. He had killed him.

One of the Englishmen cried, "Ha!" in a voice vibrating with joy, sated curiosity, and a kind of happy impatience. The other one, who still had his watch in his hand, seized hold of M. Dubuis' arm, and dragged him off at a rattling pace towards the station.

His friend counted time as he ran, with fists doubled and elbows well in to his sides: "One, two; one, two!"

And, three abreast, they bowled along in spite of their bulk, looking like any three grotesques in a comic paper.

The train was on the point of moving out as they leaped into their compartment. Then the Englishmen, taking off their travelling caps, swung them round their heads, and shouted: "Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!" After which each gravely extended his right hand to M. Dubuis. And at once, returning to their corner, they sat down side by side.

OLD MOTHER SAVAGE



OLD MOTHER SAVAGE

I HADN'T been to Virelogne for fifteen years. But I found myself there again in the autumn, for some shooting with my friend Serval, who had at last rebuilt his chateau, destroyed by the Prussians.

I was always in love with that part of the country. There are certain delicious places in this world that have a really sensuous charm about them; one loves them as one loves a woman. Those of us whom Nature moves like that have a store of tender memories of—here a spring, and there a wood, a pool, a hill, often revisited, and never failing to emotionalize us in just such a way as will some joyful event. Occasionally one's thoughts will return to a nook in a coppice, a bit of river-bank, an orchard in blossom, seen but once under a radiant sky, yet graven in one's heart like the memory of some fair unknown, met in the street on a spring morning, who, passing in her light, filmy dress, has left in one's soul and in one's body an unsatisfied longing, unforgettable—the sensation as of happiness having fluttered by, and vanished.

I loved every bit of the country at Vire-

logne, its little woods, and little streams coursing through the earth like veins, carrying life-blood to the soil. There were crayfish to be caught there, and trout, and eels. Splendid! Here and there were pools one could bathe in, and often a snipe would rise from the tall reeds that border those little water-courses.

I was going along, light as a bird, watching my two dogs hunting ahead, and Serval, twenty yards away on my right, was walking up a clover-field, when, turning by the bushes at the end of the Saudres woods, I caught sight of a ruined cottage.

And suddenly I remembered it as I had seen it last, in 1869—clean, covered with greenery, fowls in front of the door. Is there anything more mournful than a deserted home, or, rather, its sinister, shattered skeleton, still standing?

I recollected, too, that the good woman of the house had offered me a glass of wine, one day when I was very tired, and that Serval had told me all about the people who belonged there. The father, an old poacher, had been shot by gendarmes. The son, whom I remembered having seen, was a tall, lean fellow, who also had the reputation of a tremendous poacher. They were called the Savages. I wondered whether it was their real name, or merely a nickname.

I hailed Serval, and when he came up, with that long, loping stride of his, I asked: "What's become of the people here?" Whereupon he told me this story:

When war was declared, the younger Savage, who was then about thirty-three, enlisted, leaving his mother alone at home. The old lady was not over-much pitied, for she was known to be well off.

So she was left to stay all by herself in that lonely house, far from the village, on the edge of the wood. She was not at all timid about it, being of the same type as her men-folk, a formidable old woman, tall and gaunt, neither given to joking nor to being joked with. Indeed, countrywomen hardly ever laugh; that's the men's business! Sad and narrow are the good wives' souls, to match their dull and mournful lives. The men folk come in for a little fun at the inn, but the women are always very staid, with an unchanging severity of mien. The muscles of their faces have never learned how to stretch in laughter.

Old Mother Savage pursued her ordinary life at the cottage, where the snow soon lay all around. She would go to the village once a week, to buy herself bread and a little meat; then get back home at once. There was talk of wolves being about, and she would take a gun with her, her son's, a rusty gun, whose

stock was worn and polished by much use. It was weird to see her, tall, a little bent, striding slowly through the snow, the barrel of the gun showing above the black head-dress that tightly bound her head and imprisoned the grey hair, which no one had ever seen.

One day the Prussians came. They were billeted on the inhabitants, according to the latter's means and accommodation. The old lady, known to be well off, had four—big fellows, with fair skins, fair beards, blue eyes, and still fleshy, in spite of all the fatigue they had been going through; well-behaved enough, too, for all that they were in a conquered land. They showed much consideration for their lonely old hostess, and spared her all the fatigue and expense they could. The four were often to be seen, in shirt-sleeves, making their toilette round the well, dashing the ice-cold water, those raw, snowy days, over their pink and white Northern skins, while "old Mother Savage" passed backwards and forwards, getting the soup ready. Then they would clean up the kitchen, scrub the flag-stones, chop wood, peel potatoes, wash the house-linen—do, in fact, all the house-work, as four good sons might do for their mother.

But the old woman was always thinking of her own son—her tall son, with his aquiline nose and his brown eyes, and his thick mous-

tache like a brush of black hair on his lip. And she was always asking one or other of her soldier guests:

“Do you know where the 23rd infantry regiment—French, I mean—is now? My son’s in that.”

They would reply:

“No, not know; not know at all.”

And, understanding her anxiety and distress, they, who had mothers of their own at home, redoubled their little attentions to her. Yes, and she grew quite to like them, enemies though they were. Simple folk don’t go in for the luxuries of patriotic hatred; that’s the special prerogative of the superior classes. The poor and lowly, who pay the heaviest price, since each fresh burden presses desperately on their poverty, who in their masses are killed off wholesale, true food for cannon, who suffer by far the most from the atrocious misery of war, because they are the feeblest and least resistant among us, such as these scarcely understand the meaning of our bellicose ardour, our touchy points of honour, our sacred political obligations, as they are called, which in six months can exhaust two nations, victor no less than vanquished.

The folk round about there, speaking of old Mother Savage’s four Germans, would say: “Those four have fallen on their feet, and that’s a fact!”

Well, one fine morning when the old woman was at home, alone, she caught sight of a man in the distance coming across the fields towards her cottage, and presently made him out to be the postman. He handed her a folded paper. Drawing out of their case the spectacles she used for sewing, she read :

“ MRS. SAVAGE,

“ This same has got a bit of bad news to bring you. Your boy Victor was killed yesterday by a cannon-ball, which cut him in two, as you might say. I was close by, because we was next each other in the same company, and he'd been talking to me about letting you know at once if anything happened to him. So I took his watch out of his pocket, to bring it along to you when the war gets over.

“ With kind regards,

“ CÆSAR RIVOT,

“ Soldier of the 2nd class in the 23rd
Infantry.”

The letter was dated three weeks back.

She did not cry, but stood motionless, so stricken, so stupefied, that for the moment she did not suffer. “ There's Victor killed now !” she thought. Then slowly the tears came into her eyes, and suffering flooded her heart. Thoughts came to her one by one,

dreadful torturing thoughts. She would never hold him in her arms again—her boy, her big boy, never again! The gendarmes had killed the father, the Prussians had killed the son. . . . Cut in two by a cannon-ball. She seemed to see the whole horrible thing; his head falling, his eyes wide open, and his teeth gnawing the end of his big moustache, as he was wont to do when he was angry.

What had they done with his body afterwards? If only they had given her back her boy, as they had given her back her husband, with the bullet wound in the middle of his forehead!

But suddenly she heard the sounds of voices. Her Prussians were returning from the village. She hid the letter very quickly in her pocket, and met them with an unmoved face, having had time even to wipe her eyes carefully.

They were all four laughing, in excellent spirits, having got hold of a fine rabbit, poached, no doubt, and they signalled to the old lady the jolly prospect of something tasty. At once she set about getting ready the mid-day meal; but when it came to killing the rabbit, her courage suddenly failed—not that it was by any means an unaccustomed task! So one of the soldiers gave it a sharp knock behind the ears.

Now that the creature was dead, she drew

its red carcase out from the fur; but the sight of the blood covering her hands, the warm blood that she could feel getting cold and clotted, made her tremble from head to foot; all the time she was seeing her boy, her great tall son, cut in two, all red, like this creature still almost a-quiver.

She sat down to table with the Prussians, but not a single mouthful could she eat. They devoured the rabbit without paying any attention to her. And she gazed at them sidelong, silent, maturing a plan, her face so unmoved that they noticed nothing.

Suddenly she said:

“ I don't even know your names, and it's a month now we've been here together.”

They could just make out what she wanted, and told her their names. But that was not enough for her; she insisted on it all being written down, with their home addresses. Settling her spectacles on her large nose, she scrutinized this incomprehensible writing, then, folding the paper, put it in her pocket, above the letter which had told her of her son's death.

When the meal was finished, she said to the men:

“ I'm going to do something for you.” And she began carrying hay up into the granary where they slept.

When they expressed surprise at the trouble

she was taking, she explained that it would make it warmer for them; so they helped her. Piling the trusses up to the thatched roof, they made a kind of big room with the four walls of forage, warm and sweet-smelling, where they would sleep like tops.

At dinner, one of them expressed concern at seeing her again not eating. She said she had got the cramp, and lighted a good fire, to get warm all through. The four Germans went up to their bedroom by the ladder which served them for staircase every night.

As soon as the trap-door was shut after them, she removed the ladder, then noiselessly reopened the outer door and went out to fetch more trusses of straw, which she stacked in the kitchen. She went bare-foot in the snow, so softly that nothing could be heard. From time to time she would stop and listen to the loud, uneven snoring of her four sleeping soldiers.

When she considered her preparations complete, she threw one of the trusses on the fire, and as soon as it was well alight, scattered it all over the others. Then she went outside to watch.

Within a few seconds a strong glare lighted up the whole interior of the cottage, that soon became a frightful brazier, a gigantic glowing oven, whose light streamed out through the little window in a brilliant ray on to the snow.

Suddenly a loud cry sounded from the top of the house, then a clamour of human shrieks, the most awful screams of anguish and terror. Then, the trap-door falling to the ground, a tornado of flame shot up into the granary, pierced the thatched roof, leaped up against the sky like an immense torch, and the whole cottage became a blazing mass.

Nothing could now be heard from within but the crackling of the fire, and the splitting of the walls, and the noise of the beams falling. All at once the roof fell in; and from the glowing shell of the cottage a great plume of sparks shot high into the air, red against a pall of smoke.

And the snow-covered earth, illumined by the fire, shone like a silvery sheet, dyed crimson.

A clock in the distance began to strike.

Old Mother Savage stood there in front of her ruined home, armed with the gun—her son's gun—for fear that one of the soldiers might yet escape.

When she saw that all was over, she threw her weapon into that furnace, and there was the sound of a shot as it went off.

People had begun to assemble now, peasants and Prussians.

They found her tranquilly sitting on a tree-trunk, appeased by her revenge.

A German officer who spoke French perfectly asked her:

“ Where are your soldiers ?”

She raised a thin arm, pointed towards the shapeless ruin, no longer blazing, and replied in a loud voice:

“ In there !”

Everyone crowded round her. And the Prussian asked:

“ How did the fire come about ?”

She said:

“ I lighted it, myself.”

No one believed her, thinking that the disaster had driven her mad. Thereupon she told her story from beginning to end to the listening crowd, from the arrival of the letter to the last cry of the men burned within her house; she left untold not a single detail of what she had felt or done.

When she had finished, she took the two papers from her pocket, and, the better to distinguish them, put on her spectacles, for the light from the fire was getting dim. Then, holding up one, she said:

“ That’s about Victor’s death.”

Nodding towards the glowing ruin, she showed them the other, and added:

“ That’s their names, so that you can write to their homes.”

Then, calmly holding out the white sheet of paper to the officer, who had seized her by the shoulders, she continued:

“ Tell them how it happened, and tell them

it was I who did it, Victoire Simon, that they call the Savage. Don't forget."

The officer shouted an order in German. They seized her, and hurled her against the red-hot cottage walls. Twelve soldiers quickly took up position twenty paces away. She did not stir. She had understood, and waited.

A command rang out, followed at once by the long rattle of a volley. Then one shot, by itself.

The old woman did not fall. She seemed rather to sink down, as if her legs had been cut off.

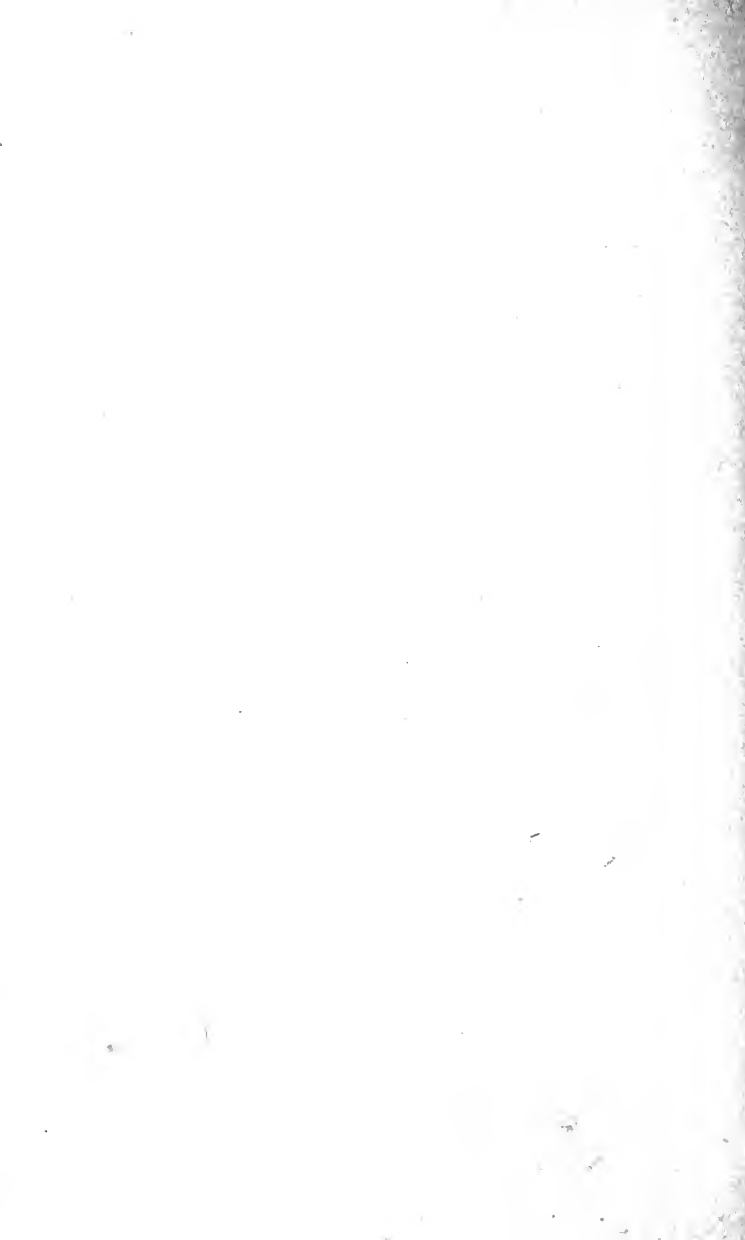
The Prussian officer went up to her. She was cut almost in two, and in her clenched fist she held her letter, covered with blood.

My friend Serval added: "The Germans burnt down my chateau, just by way of reprisal."

But I was thinking of the mothers of those four good fellows burnt in there; and of the atrocious heroism of that other mother, propped against the wall, and shot.

And I picked up a little stone, still blackened by the fire.

MISS HARRIET



MISS HARRIET

WE were a party of seven in the wagonette, four ladies and three men, one on the box beside the coachman; and our horses were slowly mounting the road that wound up the steep hillside. We had started from Étretat at daybreak, to visit the ruins of Tancarville, and, bemused by the sharpness of the morning air, were still half asleep. The ladies especially, little accustomed to these early hours, kept continually closing their eyes, nodding their heads, and even yawning, quite insensible to emotions aroused by the dawn.

It was autumn, and on both sides of the road stretched bare fields, yellow with the stubble of oats or wheat, covering the soil like a badly shaven beard. The mist rose like smoke from the earth. Larks were singing in the sky, and many birds piping in the bushes. The sun rose at last before our eyes, all red on the edge of the horizon; and, as he climbed, brighter and brighter each minute, the country seemed to awake, to smile, and stir itself, throwing off, like a girl rising from bed, its white, misty garment.

The Comte d'Etrailles, on the box seat,

suddenly cried: "Mark hare!" and pointed to a patch of clover on the left. There was the creature, slipping away, nearly hidden by the crop, and showing only his great ears; he doubled across a ploughed field, stopped, and set off again wildly; changed his mind and stopped again, uneasy, scenting danger near, undecided as to his route; then off he went, with great leaps and bounds of the hind-quarters, and disappeared in a broad square of beetroot. The men all woke up to watch the creature's flight.

"We don't seem to be making ourselves over agreeable this morning," said René Lemanoir, and looking at his neighbour, the little Baroness Serennes, who was struggling to keep awake, he said in a low voice: "Thinking of your husband, Baroness? Don't worry! he won't be back till Saturday. You've still got four days."

"How silly you are!" she answered, with a sleepy smile; then shaking off her torpor, added: "Come now, tell us something to make us laugh. Monsieur Chenal, you've the reputation of having had more love affairs than the Duc de Richelieu, now do tell us a love story of your own, whichever one you like."

Léon Chenal, an old painter, who in his prime had been a very handsome, powerfully built man, proud of his physique, and a great favourite with women, ran his hand through

his long white beard and smiled; after a few minutes' thought, he suddenly became grave.

“ This won't be amusing, ladies; I'm going to tell you the most tragic love affair of my life—I hope no friend of mine may ever inspire a love like that:—

I

“ I was five-and-twenty at the time, and scouring the country all along the Normandy coast. ‘ Scouring the country,’ as I call it, is to idle along with a knapsack from inn to inn, on the pretext of making landscape studies from Nature. I know nothing pleasanter than that wandering, heedless life. You are perfectly free, without ties or cares or plans of any sort, without even a thought of the morrow. You go tramping along the pleasantest-looking road, just as the fancy takes you, with no object but to satisfy the eye. You stop here because a stream fascinates you, there because you catch an appetizing whiff of fried potatoes at the door of some hostelry. Or, it's a scent of clematis that brings you to a standstill, or perhaps a naïve challenge from the eyes of some country wench in an inn. Never despise those simple hearts! Girls like that have plenty of soul and passion too, their cheeks are firm, and their lips are sweet, their kisses are full and hearty, as delicious as wild raspberries. Love has always a value, no

matter where it springs from. A heart that beats when you come near, eyes that weep when you go away, are things so rare and sweet and precious, that they should never be despised. I can remember meetings in ditches full of primroses, behind stables where the cows were asleep, on the straw in granaries still warm from the day's sun. I have memories of coarse homespun, and strong, supple bodies, and, I can tell you, they were good, those naïve, free kisses; more delicate in their frank animality than all the subtle caresses you get from charming and distinguished ladies.

“ But the real heart of this happy-go-lucky wandering is the country itself, the woods, the sunrise, the dusk, the moonlight. For us painters they are regular honeymoon journeys with Nature. You are alone and quite close to her in those long, tranquil meetings. Stretched out in some meadow amongst daisies and poppies, you fix your eyes, under the clear fall of the sunlight, on a little village in the distance with a pointed church steeple, whose clock is striking noon. Or perhaps by some spring bubbling up at the foot of an oak tree, in the midst of a tangle of tall, frail grasses, glistening with life, you kneel and lean over to drink the cold, clear water that wets your nose and moustache; you drink with sheer physical delight, as if you were kissing the very lips of the

spring. Sometimes in the course of these narrow streamlets, you come across a pool and plunge in, naked, and you feel on your skin from head to foot the quiver of the rapid nimble current, just like a delicious icy caress.

“ You are gay up on the hills; melancholy down beside the ponds; and when the sun drowns himself in an ocean of crimson clouds and throws a ruddy glare on the river, your spirit goes soaring. Then again in the evening, under a moon sailing across the furthest heights of the sky, you muse over a thousand strange things that would never come into your head in the full blaze of daylight.

“ Well, as I was wandering like this through the very country we're in now, I arrived one evening at the little village of Bénouville, on the cliffs between Yport and Étretat—I had come from Fécamp along the coast, which, about there, is as high and straight as a wall, with jutting chalky rocks that fall perpendicularly into the sea. I had walked the whole day on that short turf, as fine and yielding as a carpet, which springs up all along the edge of the cliff under the salt sea-wind.

“ Striding along, singing at the top of my voice, looking up at the slow circling flight of a sea-gull, with its curved wings against the blue sky, or down at the brown sail of a fishing boat on the green sea, I had spent as happy and careless and free a day as anyone

could wish. Somebody pointed out to me a little farm where they put up travellers, a sort of inn kept by a peasant woman, in the middle of the usual Normandy yard, surrounded by a double row of beeches.

“ So leaving the cliff, I dropped down to this little homestead shut in by its big trees, and presented myself to Mme. Lecacheur.

“ She was a wrinkled, stern-looking old country-woman, who seemed to be in the habit of receiving her customers with obvious reluctance, not to say distrust. It was May, and the apple-trees in full blossom spanned the yard with a roof of fragrant flowers showering down a never-ceasing rain of slow-falling pink petals on people’s shoulders, and on the grass.

“ ‘ Well, Mme. Lecacheur,’ I began, ‘ have you got a room for me ?’

“ ‘ That’s as may be,’ she replied, astonished at my knowing her name; ‘ everything’s let; but we might see what we can do, perhaps.’

“ In five minutes we had come to terms, and I had deposited my knapsack on the bare earth floor of a rural apartment furnished with a bed, two chairs, a table, and a wash-stand. It looked into the great smoke-dried kitchen, where the guests took their meals in company with the farm hands and the hostess, who was a widow.

“ I washed my hands and went out again.

The old lady had set about fricasseeing me a chicken for dinner at the huge fire-place wherein hung a smoke-blackened jack.

“ ‘ So you’ve got some visitors just now ? ’ said I.

“ ‘ There’s one lady,’ she replied in her discontented way, ‘ an Englishwoman, middlin’ old. She’s got the other room.’

“ By paying an extra twopence ha’penny a day I secured the right to have my meals in the yard when it was fine ; so they set my table in front of the door, and I proceeded to devour the lean, tough joints of a Normandy fowl, drinking pale cider the while, and munching at a huge white loaf, four days old, but exceedingly good for all that.

“ All at once the wooden gate into the road was thrown open, and a strange person came towards the house. She was very thin, very tall, and so wrapped up in a plaid shawl with red checks, that one would certainly have thought she had no arms, if a long hand had not emerged at the level of her hips, holding the white umbrella sacred to tourists. Her mummy-like face, framed in tight-rolled curls of grey hair, bobbing up and down at every step, made me think, heavens knows why, of a red herring in curl papers. She passed me quickly, with lowered eyes, and plunged into the cottage.

“ I was greatly diverted by this singular

apparition, who was doubtless my neighbour, the 'middlin' old' Englishwoman of whom my hostess had spoken.

"I did not see her again that day; but the following day, after I had settled myself down to paint in the depths of that charming valley which comes out at Étretat—you know the one I mean—happening to raise my eyes suddenly, I saw something peculiar reared up on the crest of the hill, something like a hop-pole, draped. It was she. On seeing me she vanished.

"I went in at midday for lunch and took my place at the public table, for the express purpose of making the acquaintance of this original old party. But she by no means responded to my politeness, remaining insensible even to such little attentions as pouring out water for her assiduously, and diligently passing her the dishes. A slight movement of the head, almost imperceptible, and an English word mumbled so that I could not hear what it was, were the only thanks I got.

"I ceased trying to make myself agreeable, but she still continued to occupy my thoughts.

"At the end of three days I knew all that Mme. Lecacheur knew about her.

"Her name was Miss Harriet. In searching apparently for some quiet village wherein to

spend the summer, she had lighted on Bénouville six weeks ago, and seemed by no means inclined to leave it. She never spoke at table, and ate quickly, reading away all the time at some pious little book of the strongest Protestant tendency. She distributed these tracts to everybody. The parish priest himself had received four, brought by one of the village urchins who had been given a penny for the errand. Sometimes without anything having led up to it, she would suddenly say to our hostess:—

“ ‘ Je aimé le Seigneur plus que tout ; je le admiré dans toute son création, je le adoré dans toute son nature ; je le pôrté toujours dans mon cœur.’* And she would instantly hand the amazed peasant woman one of her tracts for the conversion of the universe.

“ She was not liked in the village. The schoolmaster had said that she was an atheist, and a sort of cloud rested upon her. The parson on being consulted by Mme. Lecacheur had replied: ‘ Yes, she’s a heretic, but God graciously spares the life of the sinner, and I believe her to be a person of irreproachable morals.’

* Miss Harriet’s French, too precious to be lost, is given in the original. Its probable meaning is appended in footnotes.

“ I love the Lord more than anything ; I admire Him in the whole of His creation ; I adore Him in all His nature ; I carry Him always in my heart.”

“ These words, ‘ Athiest—Heretic,’ of which the meanings were not precisely understood, threw a doubt into every mind. It was supposed that the Englishwoman was rich and had spent her life travelling all over the world, because her family had driven her from home. Why had her family driven her from home? Well, naturally, because of her impiety.

“ She was, in truth, one of those highly principled, enthusiastic, headstrong Puritans, whom England produces in shoals; one of those excellent and unendurable old maids who haunt every *table d’hôte* in Europe, spoil Italy, poison Switzerland, render the charming towns along the Mediterranean quite uninhabitable, carrying about with them everywhere their bizarre hobbies, the manners of petrified vestals, indescribable toilettes, and a certain smell of indiarubber, which fosters the theory that at night they must be slipped into ‘ hold-alls.’

“ Whenever I used to see one in an hotel, I would take flight like a bird that sights a scarecrow in a field.

“ This one, however, seemed so extremely peculiar that she was really far from displeasing to me.

“ Mme. Lecacheur, instinctively hostile to all that was not of her own class, felt a sort of hatred in her narrow soul for the old maid’s mystic transports. She had found a word

to describe her, a decidedly contumelious word, that sounded very odd on her lips, whereto it must have come after God knows what mysterious spiritual labour.

“ ‘ She’s a demoniac,’ she said. And this word, applied to that austere and sentimental being, struck me as so irresistibly comic, that I myself took to calling her ‘ the demoniac,’ experiencing a quaint pleasure in pronouncing the word out loud whenever I caught sight of her.

“ I would ask Mme. Lecacheur: ‘ Well, what’s our “ demoniac ” doing to-day ?’

“ And the good lady would reply with a scandalized air:—

“ ‘ Would you believe it, sir, she’s picked up a toad, whose leg’s got crushed somehow, and she’s taken it to her room, and she’s put it in the wash-basin, and she’s puttin’ on a dressin’ like yo’ might on a man. If that ain’t profanity !’

“ Another time, during a walk at the foot of the cliff, she had bought a big fish, that had just been caught, for no other purpose than to throw it back into the sea. And the fisherman, though handsomely paid, had begun abusing her profusely, more really exasperated than if she had stolen money out of his pocket. For a month afterwards he could not speak of the affair without getting into a rage and swearing horribly.

“ ‘ Oh yes ! Miss Harriet was assuredly a “ demoniac ” !’

“ Mme. Lecacheur had had an inspiration of genius in so baptizing her.

“ The stable-man, who was called Sapeur, because in his youth he had served in Africa, was of quite a different opinion :—

“ ‘ The old un’s been a rare rip in her time !’” he said slyly.

“ Ah ! if the poor old maid had only known !

“ The servant girl, Céleste, never took to the idea of waiting on her, nor could I understand why. Perhaps only because she was a foreigner, of a different race, tongue, religion. In short, she was a ‘ demoniac !’

“ She spent her time wandering about the country, seeking and adoring her God as manifested in Nature. I found her, one evening, on her knees in a thicket. Catching sight of something red among the leaves, I thrust aside the branches, and there was Miss Harriet, who scrambled up in confusion at being seen like that, and fastened on me a pair of eyes as wild-looking as the eyes of a night-jar surprised by daylight.

“ Sometimes when I was working down among the rocks, I would suddenly catch sight of her on the top of the cliff, looking like a semaphore. She would be gazing passionately at the vast sea, all golden in the sun, and the wide expanse of sky deep-coloured with

the heat. Sometimes I would make her out in the depths of a valley, walking quickly, with her springy English step; and I would go to meet her, attracted, heaven knows why!—solely to see her ecstatic face, that dry ineffable visage, lit up with a deep, inward joy. Often, too, I would come on her in some nook down by a farm, seated on the grass, under the shade of an apple-tree, with her little pious book open on her knees, and her gaze wandering far away.

“ For I too stayed on and on, bound to this peaceful country-side by a thousand ties of love for its broad, gentle landscapes—I felt so happy down in this obscure farm, far from the world, and close to the earth, the good, sane, beautiful green earth that we ourselves shall help to nourish with our bodies some day. And perhaps I ought to admit, too, that a spark of curiosity had a little to do with keeping me at Mme. Lecacheur’s. I wanted to get to know something of that queer Miss Harriet, to know something of what goes on in the lonely souls of these wandering old maids of England.

II

“ We struck up an acquaintance at last in rather an odd way.

“ I had just finished a study which seemed to me first-rate; and so it was. It sold for

four hundred pounds fifteen years later. It was as simple as 'two and two make four,' but clean away from the academic. The whole right side of my canvas represented a rock, an enormous rugged rock covered with seaweed, brown and yellow and red, over which the sunshine streamed like oil.

"The light from the sun, invisible behind me, fell on the stone, turning it to fiery gold. That was the whole thing. A foreground dazzlingly bright, and flaming, and superb. On the left the sea, not the blue, nor the slate-coloured sea, but of jade-green, milky and hard under the deep blue of the sky.

"I was so pleased with my work that I danced along, taking it back to the inn. I should have liked the whole world to see it at that moment—I remember I showed it to a cow close by the path, and shouted to her:—

"'Look at that, old girl! You won't see a thing like that every day!'

"Arrived at the house, I called to Mme. Lecacheur at the top of my voice:—

"'Hi! Missis! hi! Come out and look at this!'

"The good lady appeared, and ruminated over my sketch with her stupid unseeing eyes that obviously made out nothing, not even whether the thing was meant for an ox or a house.

"Miss Harriet was on her way in, and

passed behind me just as I was holding my canvas at arm's length to show it to Mme. Lecacheur. The 'demoniac' could not help seeing, for I took care to turn the canvas so that it should not escape her glance. She stopped short, in petrified amazement. It was her own rock, it appeared, the one she was wont to climb, that she might indulge in reveries at her ease.

"She murmured so marked and flattering a British 'Aoh!' that I turned towards her smiling:—

" 'This is my latest study, Mademoiselle,' I said.

"She muttered in an ecstasy both comic and touching:—

" 'Oh! Monsieur, vô comprené le nature d'une façon palpitante! '*

"I blushed, yes, I blushed, more moved by that compliment than if I had received one from a queen. I was seduced, vanquished, overcome. I give you my word, I could have kissed her. I sat down to table beside her, as usual. For the first time she spoke, following up her thoughts out loud:—

" 'Oh! j'aimé tant le nature! †

"I passed her the bread, the water, the wine. She accepted them now with a little mummy-like smile; and I began to talk

* "Oh! sir, you've got the breath of life into it!"

† "Oh! I do so love Nature!"

' landscape ' to her. After the meal, we rose at the same moment, and going out, strolled about the yard; then, attracted doubtless by the wonderful blaze the sunset was lighting up over the sea, I opened the gate, and off we went towards the cliffs side by side, as happy as two people who have just come to understand, and see into, each other's minds.

" It was a warm, soft evening, one of those happy evenings when body and soul feel at rest. All is beauty and charm. The warm, fragrant air is full of the scent of grasses and sea-weeds, and comes sane and fresh to the nostril; it caresses the palate with the savour of the sea, and soothes the soul with its penetrating sweetness. We were walking now on the edge of the cliff above the vast ocean, with its little waves rolling in, a hundred yards below. And taking deep breaths through our open lips, we drank in the fresh breeze, which had come so far across the sea, and, salt from the long kiss of the waves, slid lingering over our faces. Swathed in her plaid shawl, with an inspired face, and with teeth bared to the wind, the Englishwoman gazed at the great sun as it sank toward the sea. Before us, far below, and far away as the eye could distinguish, a three-masted ship with all sail set showed her silhouette against the flaming sky; closer in, a steamer passed, unfurling a scroll

of smoke, that left behind an endless streak of cloud across the whole horizon.

“ Slowly, slowly, the red orb went down. Soon it touched the water, just behind the quiet sailing-ship, which appeared as in a frame of fire, in the centre of the blazing globe. Little by little, conquered by the ocean, the sun sank. We saw it merge, lessen, disappear. It was all over. Alone, the little vessel still showed its clear-cut profile against the golden background of the furthest sky.

“ With passionate eyes Miss Harriet gazed at the flaming end of the day. I felt certain she was possessed by an intense longing to embrace the sky, the sea, the whole horizon.

“ She murmured: ‘ Aoh ! j’aimé, j’aimé, j’aimé !’

“ I saw the tears standing in her eyes. She went on:—

“ ‘ Je v^odré être une petite oiseau pour m’envolé dans le firmament !’* ”

“ She remained standing, as I had often seen her, bolt upright on the edge of the cliff, with a face as glowing as her crimson shawl. I longed to put her in my sketch-book—title: ‘ Caricature of Ecstasy ’; and I turned away to hide a smile.

“ Then I began talking to her about painting, as I might have talked to a chum, dis-

* “ Oh ! how I love it ! I wish I were a little bird, and could fly away into that sky ! ”

cussing tone, and values, and strengths, in fact, all the technical terms. She listened attentively and intelligently, trying to penetrate my thoughts and divine the obscurer meaning behind my words; from time to time she exclaimed:—

“ ‘ Oh ! je comprené, je comprené. C’été très palpitante ! ’* ”

“ We went indoors.

“ The next day she came up the moment she saw me, and held out her hand. We were friends from that minute. She was a good creature, whose soul was, as it were, on springs, leaping with startling suddenness into enthusiasms. She lacked balance, like nearly all women who reach the age of fifty without marrying. She seemed as though preserved in a sort of innocence gone sour; but in her heart she had kept something of youth, of extreme youth, and that was always taking fire. She loved nature and animals with a feverish love, fermented like liquor kept too long, with the sensual love that she had never given to man.

“ I am certain that the sight of a mother dog suckling her puppies, or a mare running in a meadow with her foal at heel, or a bird’s nest full of enormous-headed naked-bodied little squeakers, made her quiver all over with

* “ Oh ! I understand, I understand. It’s got the breath of life ! ”

a passion of feeling. Poor solitary souls, sad wanderers of the *table d'hôte*, poor, lamentable, ridiculous beings—since knowing her, I have loved you all.

“ I soon perceived that she had something to say to me, but dared not say it, and I was amused at her timidity.

“ When I set off in the morning with my painting-gear on my back, she would go with me as far as the end of the village, silent, visibly troubled, trying to find words to begin. Then, all at once, she would leave me, and march briskly off with her skipping step.

“ At last one day she plucked up courage:—

“ ‘ Je vôdré voir vô comment vô faites le peinture ? Volé vô ? J’été très curieux.’* And she blushed as if she had said something extremely bold.

“ I took her off to the bottom of the Petit-Val, where I was beginning a large study.

“ She stood just behind me, following all my movements with the strictest attention.

“ Then suddenly, afraid perhaps that she might be bothering me, she said:—

“ ‘ Thank you !’ and went away.

“ But after a little she became more at ease, and used to come with me every day with obvious pleasure. She would take her camp-stool under her arm, never allowing me to

* “ I should like to watch you paint. May I? I’m so interested.”

carry it for her, and sit herself down at my side; she would stay there for hours, motionless and silent, following with her eyes every movement of my brush. When with a blot of colour stuck roughly on with the knife I succeeded in producing some true and unforeseen effect, she would utter, in spite of herself, a little 'Aoh!' of astonishment, joy, and admiration. She had a feeling of tender respect for my canvases, of almost religious reverence for the reproduction by human means of a part of the Divine work. My studies evidently were to her in a way sacred pictures; and she would sometimes talk to me of God, and try to convert me. Ah! he was a queer sort of person, that God of hers, a kind of village philosopher, without much ability or power, for she always imagined him heart-broken at the injustice that went on under his eyes—as if he had not been able to prevent it.

"She was, moreover, on excellent terms with him, and seemed to be the confidante of all his secrets and dislikes. She would say, 'God wishes,' or 'God doesn't wish,' like a sergeant who tells a recruit that the colonel 'has given orders.' From the bottom of her heart she lamented my ignorance of the Divine will, which she so eagerly sought to reveal to me; and every day I found in my pockets, in my hat when I dropped

it on the ground, in my colour-box, in the fresh - cleaned shoes standing outside my door in the morning, those little pious tracts which she doubtless received direct from heaven.

“ I treated her with frank cordiality, like an old friend. I soon began to perceive, however, that her behaviour had altered a little, though I had not noticed how it came about.

“ When I was at work, either down in the valley or in some deep lane, I would see her suddenly appear, coming on at a rapid, rhythmical walk. She would sit down abruptly, breathing quickly as if she had been running, or some deep emotion were at work within her. Her face, too, would be red all over, that peculiar English red that no other nation possesses. Then, without any cause, she would turn pale, a sort of earthy colour, and seem about to faint. Gradually she would recover her ordinary looks and begin to talk.

“ But suddenly she would leave off in the middle of a sentence, get up, and make off at such a pace and in such a strangely abrupt way, that I used to rack my brains to see if I had done anything to displease or wound her.

“ At last I decided that this must be her usual method of behaving, which had been a little modified no doubt for my sake during

the first moments of our acquaintanceship. When she came back to the farm after hours of walking along the coast, battling with the wind, her long corkscrew ringlets were often out of curl, and hung as if their springs had broken. Formerly she had never bothered about them, and used to come into dinner unceremoniously, all ruffled by that sister of hers, the breeze. But now she would go up to her room to adjust what I called her lamp-chimneys; and when, with one of those chaffing compliments that always scandalized her so, I said gallantly, 'Why, you're as beautiful as a star to-day, Miss Harriet!' a little blush would cover her face, like the blush of a girl of fifteen.

"Presently she reverted entirely to the wild state, and ceased coming to see me paint. 'It's a mood,' thought I, 'that will pass off.' But it did not. If I spoke to her now, she either replied with affected indifference or glum exasperation. And she had fits of abruptness, impatience, and nerves. I only saw her now at meals, and we scarcely spoke at all. I thought I really must have annoyed her in some way, and one evening I asked her:—

" 'Miss Harriet, why aren't you the same to me as you used to be? What have I done to offend you? You're making me quite unhappy!'

“ She answered angrily in the queerest tone of voice:—

“ ‘ J’été toujours avec vô le même qu’autre fois ! Ce n’été pas vrai, pas vrai !* and she ran off and shut herself up in her own room.

“ Sometimes she would look at me very strangely. I have often thought since, that prisoners condemned to death must look like that when they are called on the morning of their execution. There was a sort of madness in her eye, a mystic, violent madness; and something besides, a fever, an overstrained longing, chafing at the impossibility of its fulfilment or realization. And it seemed to me as if there were a fight raging within her, and her heart were struggling with some unknown force which she was trying to subdue. Ah ! yes, and something else too . . . how can I express it ?

III

“ The revelation was strange to a degree.

“ For some time I had been working every day, from dawn on, at a picture which had the following for its subject:—

“ A deep sheltered ravine, overtopped by two slopes covered with trees and brambles, stretching away from the eye till it was lost in a bath of the milky vaporous mist that

* “ I am just the same to you as I always was. It’s not true, it’s not true.”

floats over valleys at sunrise. And coming towards you from far away through the heavy transparent haze, you saw, or rather divined, two human forms, youth and maiden, linked in a close embrace, her face raised to his, his bent to hers, their lips meeting.

“ A first ray of sunlight, gliding through the branches, shot across this daybreak mist, and, turning it to a shaft of rose colour behind these simple lovers, made their dim shapes move as it were through silver light. It was good, I can *tell* you; really good !

“ I was working on the slope leading to the little Étretat valley, and was lucky enough that particular morning to have just the sort of floating wrack I wanted. Suddenly something rose up in front of me like a ghost; it was Miss Harriet. Catching sight of me she was on the point of running off, but I called out to her :—

“ ‘ Ah ! do come here, Mademoiselle; I’ve got a little picture to show you.’

“ She came, reluctantly enough as it seemed, and I held out my sketch. She said nothing, but remained looking at it a long time motionless; then suddenly—she began to cry. She wept with the spasmodic sobbing of one who has long fought against her tears, and worn out, abandons herself, still protesting.

“ I started up, myself moved by this grief that I could not understand; and with the

instinct of a true Frenchman, who acts before he thinks, I gave her hands a quick affectionate grasp. She left them in mine for some seconds, and I felt them tremble as if all her nerves were writhing. Then suddenly she drew, or rather tore them away. But I had recognized that shiver. I had felt it before—there's no mistaking it. Ah! that quiver of a woman's love, whether she's fifteen or fifty, gentle or simple, goes straight to your heart, you can't mistake it. All her poor being was vibrating, responding, swooning; and I knew it. Before I could say a word, she was gone, leaving me as amazed as though I had seen a miracle, as unhappy as if I had committed a crime.

“ I did not go in for lunch, but took a stroll along the cliff, feeling as much like crying as laughing; the affair was so comic, yet so lamentable; my position was so ridiculous, and hers miserable enough to drive her mad.

“ I asked myself what on earth I ought to do.

“ I felt there was nothing for it but to go away, and made up my mind to do so. After wandering about sad and thoughtful till dinner time, I went in as the soup appeared.

“ We sat down to table as usual. Miss Harriet was there, eating solemnly, and neither speaking nor raising her eyes. In other respects she looked and behaved as usual. I

waited for the end of the meal, then turned to our hostess and said:—

“ ‘ Well, Mme. Lecacheur, I shall have to be off in a day or two !’

“ The good woman, surprised and vexed, instantly droned out:—

“ ‘ What’s that you say, sir ? Going to leave us ? Why, we we’ve got so used to havin’ you !’

“ I was looking at Miss Harriet out of the corner of my eye; her face did not change. But Céleste, the little maid, looked up at me. She was a big, ruddy, fresh-looking girl of eighteen, as strong as a horse, and, strange to say, very clean. I used to kiss her sometimes in the corner, just to keep myself in practice, nothing more. Dinner came to an end.

“ I went out to smoke my pipe under the apple trees, walking backwards and forwards from one end of the yard to the other. All the reflections I had made during the day, the morning’s weird discovery of that grotesque passionate love which had fixed on me, and all sorts of sweet and disturbing reminiscences that followed in the train of that discovery, perhaps even the look the servant girl had given me when I spoke of departure, all these joined in putting me into a wanton mood. My lips began tingling as if they had been kissed, and the blood ran madly in my veins.

“ Night came, throwing dark shadows under the trees; I caught sight of Céleste going to shut the fowl-house at the far side of the enclosure. I ran forward on tiptoe, so that she heard nothing, and just as she was raising herself, after having lowered the little trap-door where the fowls go in and out, I seized her in my arms, and covered her moon face with a shower of kisses. She struggled with me, but, laughing all the time, pretty well used, no doubt, to that sort of thing. Something made me leave hold of her suddenly and fly round. I felt somehow there was someone behind us!

“ It was Miss Harriet on her way indoors; she had seen us, and stood petrified, as if she had seen a ghost. Then she disappeared in the darkness.

“ I went back to the house ashamed and disturbed, more miserable at being caught by her doing such a thing than if she had found me committing a criminal act.

“ My nerves were all unstrung, and I slept badly, haunted by dismal thoughts. I seemed to hear someone crying. No doubt I was mistaken; several times I thought I heard footsteps about the house, and someone opening the outer door. Towards morning fatigue overwhelmed me, and I slept at last. I woke late, and only made my appearance at lunch time, still upset, and without having made up my mind what line to take.

“ No one had seen Miss Harriet. We waited for her; she did not appear. Mme. Lecacheur went into her room. The Englishwoman was not there. She must have gone out at day-break, as she often did, to see the sun rise. No one expressed surprise, and we began the meal in silence.

“ It was extremely hot, one of those burning, heavy days, when not a leaf is stirring. The table had been dragged out of doors, under an apple tree, and from time to time Sapeur went to the cellar to fill the cider jug, everyone was so thirsty. Céleste brought the dishes from the kitchen, a ragoût of mutton with potatoes, a fried rabbit, and a salad. Then she placed before us a dish of cherries, the first of the season.

“ Thinking they would be more delicious if they were freshened up, I begged the little maid to draw me a bucket of cold water from the well.

“ She came back in five minutes saying there was something wrong with it. She had let the rope out to the full, and the bucket had touched the bottom, but had come up again empty. Mme. Lecacheur wished to see for herself, and went off to peer into the depths. She came back saying that she could see something in her well that oughtn't to be there. A neighbour must have thrown in some bundles of straw out of spite. I also went to have a

look, hoping to be better able to make out this object, whatever it was. I leaned over the edge, and saw something that seemed white. But what? It then occurred to me to let down a lantern on the end of a rope. The yellow glare danced about on the stone sides, sinking deeper and deeper. Sapeur and Céleste had joined us, and we were all four leaning over the opening. The lantern stopped above an indistinct mass of black and white, of a strange, puzzling appearance.

“ ‘ It’s an ’orse,’ cried out Sapeur. ‘ I can see the ’oof. For sure ’e got out of the medder last night and fell in !’

“ But suddenly a shiver went through me to the very marrow. I had just distinguished a foot and then a leg straight upon end; the whole body and the other leg were hidden under the water.

“ Trembling so violently that the lantern danced wildly above that shoe, I stammered out in an almost inaudible voice:—

“ ‘ It’s a woman down there . . . it’s—it’s—Miss Harriet !’

Sapeur was the only one who did not move a muscle. He had seen all sorts of things in Africa !

“ Mme. Lecacheur and Céleste, uttering piercing shrieks, fled from the spot.

“ The body had to be recovered, so I tied the rope firmly round the man’s waist, and

let him down very slowly by means of the pulley, watching him as he sank into the shadow. He had the lantern and another rope in his hands. Presently his voice, which seemed to come from the middle of the earth, cried, 'Stop!' and I saw him fishing something up from the water; it was the other leg; then he tied the heels together with the spare rope, and cried again, 'Haul away!'

"I pulled him up, but I felt my arms cracking, and the muscles going slack. I was terrified I should leave go of the rope and let him fall.

"'Well?' I exclaimed, as his head appeared above the curb, as if I had expected him to give me tidings of her who was lying there at the bottom.

"We both got on to the stone ledge, and, face to face, bending over the orifice, began to hoist the body.

"Mme. Lecacheur and Céleste watched us from a distance, hiding behind the house wall. When they perceived the black shoes and white stockings of the drowned woman appearing, they vanished.

"Sapeur seized the ankles, and in this attitude the poor modest old maid was dragged out. The head was in a frightful state, black with mud and wounds, her long grey hair, quite loose, and out of curl for all time, hung dripping and slimy. Sapeur said scornfully:

“ ‘ Oh ! lor ! ain’t she lean ? ’ ”

“ We carried her to her room, and as the two women did not appear, the stableman and I laid out the body. I washed the sad, distorted face. Under my touch one eye opened a little and gazed at me with the pale, cold, terrible gaze of a corpse, the gaze that seems to come from so far beyond all life. I did the best I could with the scattered hair, and, with my clumsy hands, arranged it on her forehead in a new and odd-looking fashion. Then bashfully, as though committing a sacrilege, I took off her soaked garments, exposing her shoulders, her chest, and her long arms that were as thin as sticks.

“ Then I went out to look for flowers—poppies, cornflowers, marguerites, and fresh sweet-scented grasses — and with these I covered her death-bed.

“ Being the only friend near her, I had to fulfil the usual formalities. A letter found in her pocket, written at the last moment, asked that she might be buried in the village where her last days had been spent. A terrible thought wrung my heart. Was it because of me that she wished to be laid to her rest here ?

“ Towards evening all the gossips and neighbours came to have a look at the body, but I kept them out; I intended to be alone with her, and to watch there all night. I

gazed at her by the light of the candles, poor unhappy woman, dying, an utter stranger, so pitifully, so far from home. Somewhere perhaps she had friends and relatives; and I wondered what her childhood and her life had been like! From whence had she come, wandering, all by herself, like a lost dog driven from home? What secret of suffering and despair lay hidden in that poor body, the awkward body she had carried about with her throughout life, like some shameful burden; the ridiculous exterior which had driven far away from her all affection and love?

“How many unhappy creatures there are in this world! Upon this poor human being I felt the eternal injustice of implacable Nature had been laid! All was over for her, and perhaps she had never felt the one thing that sustains the greatest outcast, that hope of being loved some day! Else why did she hide herself like this, why shun people so? Why love so passionately, so tenderly, every living thing and creature that was not man? And I began to understand that here was one who really believed in God, believed that hereafter her sufferings would be made up to her. And now she was going to become one with the earth, to return to life as a plant, to blossom in the sun, yield grass for the cattle, grain for the birds, and so through the flesh of animals

once more become the flesh of human beings. But that which we call her soul was quenched for ever at the bottom of that dark well. She would never suffer again. She had exchanged that life of hers for those other lives that would be born again of her.

“ Hours passed in our sinister, silent communion. A pale glimmer heralded the dawn; there came a rosy beam gliding to the bed, laying a bar of light across the sheets and on the hands. It was the hour she loved so much. The awakening birds began singing in the trees.

“ I threw the window wide open, flung back the curtains that the whole sky might see us, and bending over the icy body, I took her poor bruised head between my hands, and slowly, without any feeling of terror or disgust, I gave those lips a long kiss—the first they had ever known. . . .”

Léon Chenal ceased speaking. The women were all in tears. The Comte d'Etrailles could be heard using his handkerchief vigorously on the box. The coachman, alone unmoved, had fallen into a doze; and his horses, no longer feeling the touch of the whip, had slackened their pace to a lazy walk. The wagonette seemed hardly to move; it had suddenly grown heavy, as though laden with grief.



THE UMBRELLA



THE UMBRELLA

MME. OREILLE was thrifty. She knew the exact value of a halfpenny, and possessed a perfect arsenal of hard and fast maxims upon the multiplication of money. Her servant certainly had bitter work to secure any perquisites, and M. Oreille found it extremely difficult to get his pocket money. They were comfortably off, however, having children; but Mme. Oreille suffered real physical pain when she had to let the good silver coins slip out of her grasp—it was like a rent in her heart; and whenever she was compelled to make an outlay of any importance she always slept badly the night after. Oreille was continually saying:—

“ You really might be more open-handed; we don't live up to our income.”

“ You never can tell what might happen,” she would reply; “ better to have too much than too little.”

She was a woman of forty, short, bustling, wrinkled, clean, and frequently out of temper.

Her husband was continually groaning over the privations she made him suffer; some of them he felt to be particularly painful, for they wounded his vanity.

He was one of the head clerks at the War Office, and had remained there solely at his wife's command, to augment an income already more than sufficient.

Well, it so happened that for two whole years he had been going to business with a certain patched umbrella which was a standing joke to his colleagues. Tired of their chaff, he insisted, at last on Mme. Oreille buying him a new one. She bought one for six-and-eightpence, a speciality at one of the big shops. His fellow-clerks, who recognized in this object an article to be seen in thousands all over Paris, began of course to chaff him afresh, and Oreille suffered tortures. The umbrella turned out good for nothing. In three months it was done for, and the whole War Office resounded with jokes. They even made a song on the subject, which was to be heard from morning till night, from top to bottom of the huge building.

Thereupon, Oreille, in his exasperation, ordered his wife to choose him a new gamp, of good silk, at not less than sixteen shillings, and to bring him the receipt as a guarantee that she had paid that price. She bought one for fourteen-and-sevenpence-farthing, and, reddening with anger as she handed it to her husband, announced:

“ There, that'll have to do for at least five years.”

Oreille was triumphant; he had a real success at the office. When he returned that evening, his wife said to him, with an uneasy glance at the umbrella:

"You oughtn't to keep the elastic done up like that, it's the very way to cut the silk. You'll have to look after *this* one carefully, for I shan't buy you another in a hurry."

She caught hold of it, unfastened it, and shook out the folds. But she stood transfixed with horror. A round hole, as big as a farthing, was to be seen in the middle of the umbrella. It was a cigar-burn!

"What's this?" she stammered.

All unconscious, her husband blandly replied:

"Eh, what? What do you say?"

She choked so dreadfully with rage that she could not get her words out:

"You—you—you've burnt—your umbrella. You—you're mad! Do you want to ruin us?"

He turned round, feeling himself grow pale.

"What did you say?"

"I say that you've burnt your umbrella. Look here!"

And rushing up as though about to beat him, she thrust the little round burn under his very nose.

He was aghast at the sight of the rent, and babbled:

"*That*—that—why, what is it? I—I don't

know. I've done nothing to it, nothing. I swear. *I don't know what's the matter with the umbrella !*"

" I'll wager you've been playing the fool with it at the office, you've been peacocking about, showing it off to everyone."

He replied:

" Well, I opened it just once to show what a beauty it was. That's all, I swear."

But she was trembling with rage, and began treating him to one of those conjugal scenes that make the family hearth, to a peaceful man, more formidable than a bullet-raked battle-field.

She made a patch with a piece cut from the old umbrella, which was of a different colour; and the next day Oreille went off with his mended weapon. He put it in his locker, and thought no more about it, except as a vague unpleasant memory.

But, hardly had he got indoors that evening before his wife seized the umbrella from him, opened it to take note of its condition, and was struck dumb before an irreparable disaster. It was riddled with little holes, evidently burns, as if someone had emptied the contents of a lighted pipe over it. The thing was ruined, ruined beyond recall.

She gazed at it without saying a word, her rage was such that no sound would come out of her throat. Her husband also contem-

plated the wreck, and stood there in a stupor of horrid consternation.

Then they looked at each other; presently he dropped his eyes, and next moment had the ruined object hurled at his face. Recovering her voice, she shouted in a transport of fury:

“ Ah! You scoundrel! You utter scoundrel! You’ve done it on purpose! But I’ll pay you out! You’ll get no other——”

The conjugal scene was played over again. After an hour of storm, he was at last able to get in a remark. He swore that he knew nothing about it, and that it could only have been done out of spite or revenge.

He was delivered by the ringing of the door bell, and the entrance of a friend who had come to dine with them.

Mme. Oreille laid the case before him. As to buying another umbrella, it was out of the question.

“ In that case,” argued the friend with some reason, “ his clothes, which are worth more than the umbrella, will certainly get spoilt.”

Still in a rage, the little woman replied:

“ Well, then, he’ll have to take the marketing umbrella. I will *not* get him a new silk.”

At this proposition, Oreille rebelled:

“ Then I shall hand in my resignation,” he said; “ I will *not* go to the War Office with a marketing gamp.”

The friend went on:

“ Why not get this one recovered; it won't cost so very much !”

Mme. Oreille stammered angrily :

“ It'll cost at least six-and-sixpence to have it re-covered. Six-and-six added to fourteen-and-sevenpence makes one pound one and a penny. Twenty-one shillings for an umbrella; why, it's madness, imbecility !”

The friend, a person of very moderate means, here had an inspiration :

“ Make your Insurance Company pay for it. They pay for anything that's burnt, so long as the damage is done in your own house.”

On receiving this piece of advice the little woman at once calmed down, and after a moment's reflection said to her husband :

“ To-morrow before going to the War Office you'll just go to the office of the ' Maternelle,' show the state of your umbrella, and claim the damage.”

M. Oreille gave a start.

“ I wouldn't dare to do such a thing !” he said; “ it's just a loss of fourteen-and-sixpence, and there's an end of it. We shan't die of that.”

And he went out next day with a stick. It was luckily fine. Left alone, at home, Mme. Oreille could not forget the loss of her fourteen-and-sevenpence. She put the umbrella on the dining-table and moved round it, unable to make up her mind.

The thought of the fire insurance company haunted her incessantly, but she dared not face the supercilious glances of the men to whom she would have to speak; she was a timid woman in public, a mere trifle made her blush, and she was always embarrassed when she had to talk to strangers.

And yet her regrets over that fourteen-and-sevenpence gave her actual bodily suffering. She tried not to think about it, but the grievous memory of the loss continued without ceasing to torment her. What was to be done? Time passed, and she could not decide. Then all at once, with the desperate valour that cowards suddenly develop, she made up her mind.

“ I'll go; we shall just see !”

But it was first necessary to prepare the umbrella, so that the damage should be unmistakable, and the cause thereof easily proved. She took a match from the mantelpiece and made a big burn, the size of her hand, between the ribs; then she daintily rolled up what was left of the silk, fixed the elastic band round it, put on her hat and coat, and walked quickly towards the Rue de Rivoli, where the insurance office was situated.

She looked at the numbers on the houses. There were still twenty-eight to come. All the better! She would be able to think the

thing over a little. She advanced more and more slowly. Suddenly she gave a start. There was the door, on which was emblazoned in gold letters: " ' La Maternelle '—Insurance against fire." Already! She stood still for a second, bashful and uneasy, then walked past, came back, passed the door again, and once more came back.

At last she said to herself:

" I've got to go in, so, the sooner the better."

But as she entered the building, she felt her heart beating fast. She went into a huge apartment, with wickets all round; and behind every wicket could be seen the head of a man, whose body was hidden by the wire screen.

A gentleman appeared, with papers in his hand.

She stopped him, and said in a small, timid voice:

" Excuse me, sir, but could you tell me where I ought to go to make a claim for damage to burnt property?"

He replied in a sonorous voice:

" First floor, to the left. The Serious Disaster department."

These words increased her nervousness; she longed to creep silently away and sacrifice her fourteen-and-sevenpence. But at the thought of that sum, a little of her courage

returned, and she went upstairs, breathless, and pausing at every step.

On the first floor she saw a door, and knocked. A high-pitched voice cried out:

“Come in.”

She entered, and found herself in a large apartment where three gentlemen, all adorned with the ribbon of the legion of honour, stood solemnly talking.

“What may your pleasure be, madame?” asked one of them.

She could hardly find the words, and stuttered out:

“I have come—I have come—here—about—an accident.”

The polite gentleman handed her a chair.

“Kindly take a seat; I shall be at your service in one minute.”

And, turning again to the other two, he resumed his conversation.

“The Company, gentlemen, does not admit its responsibility towards you to any greater extent than sixteen thousand pounds. We cannot entertain your claim for the four thousand beyond that. Besides, the estimate——”

One of the two here interrupted:

“Very well, sir, the Court will decide the matter. There is nothing left for us but to take our leave.”

And bowing ceremoniously, they went out of

the room. Oh! if she had only dared to go out with them, she would have fled and abandoned everything! But how could she? The gentleman returned, and making her a bow, said:

“ Now, madame, of what use can I be to you ?”

With great difficulty she got out the words:

“ I have come—for this——”

The director lowered his eyes, in frank astonishment, towards the object she held out to him.

She tried, with a trembling hand, to undo the elastic. After several efforts she succeeded, and opened the ragged skeleton with a jerk.

The man said in a compassionate voice:

“ It *does* appear to be in a bad way.”

She declared hesitatingly:

“ It cost me sixteen shillings.”

He was surprised.

“ Really! So much ?”

“ Yes, it was a thoroughly good one. I wished you to see the state of it.”

“ Quite so; I do see. Quite so. But I do *not* see in what way this concerns me.”

An uneasy thought assailed her. Perhaps this company did not refund small losses, and she said:

“ But—it’s *burnt*.”

The gentleman did not deny it.

“ I quite see it is.”

Her jaw dropped; she was at a loss what to say. Then, suddenly realizing what she had neglected to explain, she went on hurriedly:

“ I am Mme. Oreille. We are insured in the ‘ Maternelle,’ and I have come to make a claim for this damage.” Fearing a positive refusal she hastened to add:

“ I only ask that you should see to the recovering of it.”

“ But—madame——” said the embarrassed director, “ we’re not an umbrella shop. We really cannot undertake repairs of this kind.”

The little woman felt her self-possession returning. There was to be a fight—well, she would fight! She was no longer frightened.

“ Oh !” she said. “ I am only asking you to refund me the price of the repairs. I can easily get it done myself.”

The gentleman seemed confused.

“ Really, madame, it’s so very trivial. We are never asked for damages in cases of accident of such a minute nature. You must see that we positively cannot refund for handkerchiefs, gloves, brooms, old slippers, all the little things daily exposed to risk of damage by fire.”

She reddened, feeling her temper rising.

“ Well, sir,” she said, “ we had a chimney on fire last December, which meant a loss of at least twenty pounds, and M. Oreille never

claimed anything from the Company then; so it's certainly only fair that they should pay for my umbrella now!"

The director, who scented an untruth, said with a smile:

"You will admit, madame, that it is rather remarkable that M. Oreille, after claiming nothing over a loss of twenty pounds, should want us to get an umbrella repaired, a matter of four or five shillings."

In no way disconcerted by this, she replied:

"Pardon me, sir, the twenty pounds damage was entirely M. Oreille's affair, whereas this loss of fourteen - and - sixpence is entirely Mme. Oreille's, which is not at all the same thing."

He began to see that he would never get rid of her, and was only wasting his time, so he said resignedly:

"Be so kind as to tell me how the accident occurred."

She felt that victory was hers, and began her story:

"This is how it was, sir. I have in my hall a sort of bronze receptacle for sticks and umbrellas. The other day, on coming home, I placed this umbrella there. I must tell you, that just over this receptacle there is a little shelf where candles and matches are kept. I reached up for the matches, you see. I was obliged to strike four; the first one missed fire,

the second lighted and went out, and the same with the third."

The director interrupted her to launch a witticism:

"Ah! they must have been Government matches!"

She completely failed to see the joke, and went on:

"Very likely. Anyway, the fourth burned properly, and I lighted my candle; then I went to my room, and went to bed. After about a quarter of an hour, I thought I smelt a smell of burning. I am always terrified of fire. Oh! if ever we have a real disaster you may be sure it won't be my fault. Particularly since that chimney on fire of which I told you; since then I'm really frightened to death. So up I got, and went about hunting and sniffing like a pointer, and at last I discovered that my umbrella was on fire. It was, no doubt, one of those matches dropped into it. You see the state it's in now!"

The director had made up his mind:

"At what do you estimate the damage?" he asked.

She remained speechless, not daring to fix on any sum. Then, wishing to appear generous, she said:

"I will leave it to you to get it repaired. I have every confidence in you."

He shook his head.

"No, madame, that I cannot do. Tell me how much you want,"

"Well—I think I ought to—now—I don't want to take advantage of you—we might manage it this way. I will take my umbrella to a shop, and have it covered with good silk, good durable silk, and I'll bring you the bill. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly, madame; that is understood then. Here is the order for the cashier, who will refund you whatever you spend."

And he held out a card to Mme. Oreille, who seized it, and, expressing her thanks, rose and left the room, in a hurry to get out of doors, for fear he should change his mind.

This time she marched gaily down the street, looking for a fashionable umbrella shop. When she discovered one that had an extremely superior appearance, she went in and said in a confident voice:

"This umbrella is to be covered with silk, really good silk. Use the very best you have. I am not particular as to price."

THE PIECE OF STRING



THE PIECE OF STRING

ALONG all the roads round Goderville peasants and their wives were coming in towards the town, for it was market day.

The men all walked at a stolid pace, throwing the whole weight of their bodies forward at each movement of their long legs; their limbs were gnarled and out of shape from hard work, from bending over the plough, which humps the left shoulder and twists the figure—from reaping, which bows the knees in the effort to get good balance—from every kind of slow and painful field labour. Their blue smocks, starched till they shone as if varnished, and ornamented at collar and cuffs with a little pattern in white thread, swelled out round their bony bodies, like balloons ready for flight, with a head, two arms, and two feet emerging.

Some were dragging along a cow, or calf, at the end of a rope. And with branches still covered with leaves, their wives would swish the animal from behind to make it go quicker.

The women carried on their arms great baskets, whence issued the heads of fowls or ducks. And they walked with a shorter,

brisker step than the men, with their straight, meagre figures draped in a little patterned shawl pinned over on their flat chests, their heads enveloped in white linen plastered on to the hair and surmounted by a cap.

Then came a country cart, whose horse with its jerky trot was jolting two men seated side by side, and a woman at the back of the vehicle, who was holding on to both sides, to diminish the severity of the bumping.

There was a crowd in Goderville market-place, a confusion of men and beasts. Horns of oxen, long-napped tall hats of the richer peasants, and the women's head-dresses, rose above the surface of the throng. Voices, bawling, sharp, and squeaky, were mingled in barbarous never-ending clamour, dominated at times by the mighty guffaw of some broad-chested countryman having his joke, or by the long-drawn lowing of a cow tied up to the wall of a house.

It all smelt of stables, milk and manure, of hay and sweat, gave off, in fact, that terribly sour savour, human, yet bestial, characteristic of workers in the fields.

Master Hauchecorne, of Breauté, coming in to Goderville, was making his way towards the market-place, when he perceived on the ground a short piece of string. Master Hauchecorne, thrifty like every true Norman, thought that anything was worth picking up

that could be put to any use; so, stooping painfully, for he suffered from rheumatism, he picked up the bit of thin cord, and was carefully rolling it up when he observed Master Malandain, the saddler, standing in his doorway, looking at him. They had once had a difference about a halter, and owed each other a grudge, for both were by nature inclined to bear malice. Master Hauchecorne was seized with a sort of shame at being thus seen by his enemy, grubbing in the mud for a bit of string. He abruptly hid his spoil under his blouse, then put it in his trouser's pocket, and pretended to be still looking on the ground for something he could not find; finally he went off towards the market, with his head poked forward, bent nearly double by his rheumatism.

He was swallowed up at once in the slow-moving, noisy crowd, disputing over its interminable bargainings. Peasants were punching the cows, moving hither and thither, in perpetual fear of being taken in, and not daring to make up their minds; scrutinizing the seller's eye, to try and discover the deceit in the man, and the blemish in his beast.

The women, placing their great baskets at their feet, had taken out their fowls, which lay on the ground with legs tied together, eyes wild with fright, and crests all scarlet.

They listened to the offers made, and held

out for their prices with wooden, impassive faces; then, suddenly deciding to take the bid, would scream after the customer as he slowly walked away:

“Done with you, Master Anthime. You shall have it.”

Then, little by little, the market-place emptied, and, the Angelus ringing midday, those who lived too far away straggled into the inns.

At Jourdain's, the big dining-room was crowded with guests, just as the huge courtyard was crowded with vehicles of every breed, carts, cabriolets, wagonettes, tilburys, covered carts innumerable, yellow with mud, out of trim and patched, some raising their two shafts, like arms, to the sky, some with nose on the ground and tail in the air.

Right up against the diners the immense fireplace, flaming brightly, threw a mighty heat on to the backs of the right-hand row seated at table. Three jacks were turning, garnished with chickens, pigeons, and legs of mutton, and a delectable odour of roast meat, and of gravy streaming over the well-browned crackling, rose from the hearth, bringing joy to the heart, and water to the mouth.

All the aristocracy of the plough dined at M. Jourdain's, innkeeper and horsedealer, a shrewd fellow, and a “warm man.”

The dishes were passed, and emptied, to-

gether with mugs of golden cider. Everyone told the story of his bargains, and asked his neighbour about the crops. The weather was good for green stuff, but a little damp for corn.

Suddenly, from the courtyard in front of the house, came the roll of a drum.

All but a few, too lazy to move, jumped up at once, and flew to the doors and windows, their mouths still full and their napkins in their hands.

Finishing off the roll of his drum, the towncrier shouted in staccato tones, with a scansion of phrase peculiarly out of rhythm:

“This is to inform the inhabitants of Goderville, and all others—present at the market, that there was lost this morning on the Beuzeville road between nine and ten o’clock, a black leather pocket-book, containing five hundred francs and some business papers. It should be returned—to the Town Hall immediately, or to Master Fortuné Houlbrèque at Manneville. A reward of twenty francs is offered.”

The man went by, and presently the dull rumble of the drum was heard again, and then the crier’s voice, fainter in the distance.

Everyone began discussing the event, calculating the chances of Master Houlbrèque’s recovering or not recovering his pocket-book.

And so the meal came to an end.

They were finishing their coffee when the brigadier of gendarmes appeared at the door, and asked:

“Is Master Hauchecorne, of Breauté, here?”

Master Hauchecorne, seated at the far end of the table, answered:

“Here!”

“Master Hauchecorne,” proceeded the officer, “will you be so good as to come with me to the Town Hall. The mayor would like to speak to you.”

Surprised and uneasy, the peasant gulped down his cognac, rose, and stooping even more than in the morning, for the first steps after resting were always particularly painful, got himself started, repeating:

“All right! I’m coming!” and followed the sergeant.

The mayor was awaiting him, seated in an armchair. He was the notary of the district, a stout, serious man, full of pompous phrases.

“Master Hauchecorne,” said he, “you were seen this morning to pick up, on the Beuzeville road, the pocket-book lost by Master Houlbrèque, of Manneville.”

The peasant, in stupefaction, gazed at the mayor, intimidated at once by this suspicion which lay heavy upon him without his comprehending it.

“Me? me—me pick up that pocket-book?”

" Yes, you."

" On my word of honour, I didn't ! Why, I didn't even know about it !"

" You were seen."

" Seen ? I ? Who saw me ?"

" M. Malandain, the saddler."

Then the old man remembered, and understood. Reddening with anger, he said :

" Ah ! he saw me, that animal ! Well, what he saw me pick up was this string, look here, M. le Maire !"

And rummaging in his pocket, he pulled out the little piece of string.

But the mayor shook his head incredulously.

" You won't make me believe, Master Hauchecorne, that M. Malandain, a trustworthy man, took that piece of string for a pocket-book."

The enraged peasant raised his hand, spat solemnly to show his good faith, and repeated :

" It's God's truth, all the same, the sacred truth, M. le Maire. There, on my soul and honour, I say it again. "

The mayor proceeded.

" After having picked up the article in question, you even went on searching in the mud, to make sure a coin or two mightn't have fallen out."

The poor old fellow choked with indignation and fear.

“To say such things! . . . How can anyone . . . telling lies like that, to undo an honest man! How can anyone?”

Protest as he would, he was not believed.

They confronted him with M. Malandain, who repeated and substantiated his story. The two abused each other for a whole hour. By his own request, Master Hauchecorne was searched. Nothing was found on him.

At last the mayor, thoroughly puzzled, dismissed him, warning him that he was going to give notice to the public prosecutor and take his instructions.

The news had spread. As he went out of the Town Hall the old man was surrounded, and all sorts of serious or mocking questions were put to him, but no one showed the slightest indignation. He began to tell the story of the piece of string. They did not believe him. Everybody laughed.

He went on, stopped by everyone, stopping everyone he knew, to tell his story over and over again, protesting, showing his pockets turned inside out, to prove that he had nothing on him. The only answer he got was:

“Get along, you sly old dog!”

He began to feel angry, worrying himself into a fever of irritation, miserable at not being believed, at a loss what to do, and continually repeating his story.

Night came on. It was time to go home.

He set out with three neighbours, to whom he showed the spot where he had picked up the piece of string; and the whole way home he kept talking of his misadventure.

In the evening he made a round of the village of Breauté, to tell everybody all about it. He came across unbelievers only.

He was ill all night.

The next day, about one o'clock, Marius Paumelle, a labourer at Master Breton's, a farmer at Ymauville, restored the pocket-book and its contents to Master Houlbrèque, of Manneville.

This man declared that he had found the object on the road; but not being able to read, he had taken it home and given it to his master.

The news spread through the neighbourhood. Master Hauchecorne was informed of it, and started off at once on a round, to tell his story all over again, with its proper ending. It was a triumph.

"What knocked me over," he said, "was not so much the thing itself, you know, but that charge of lying. There's nothing hurts a man so much as being thought a liar."

The whole day long he talked of his adventure, telling it to people he met on the roads, to people drinking at the inns, and even at the church door on the following Sunday. He stopped perfect strangers to tell them about

it. He was easy in his mind now, and yet—there was something that bothered him, though he could not exactly arrive at what it was. People had an amused look while they were listening to him. They did not seem convinced. He felt as if a lot of tattle was going on behind his back.

On the Tuesday of the following week he went off to Goderville market, urged thereto solely by the desire to tell his story. Malandain, standing at his door, began to laugh as he went past. Why?

He began his story to a farmer of Criquetot, who did not let him finish, but, giving him a dig in the pit of his stomach, shouted in his face: "Get along, you old rogue!" and turned his back.

Master Hauchecorne stopped short, confused, and more and more uneasy. Why was he being called an "old rogue"?

When he was seated at table at Jourdain's inn he began again to explain the whole affair.

A horse-dealer from Montvillier called out: "Come, come, that's an old trick; I know all about your piece of string!"

Hauchecorne stammered:

"But it's been found, that pocket-book!"

But the other went on:

"Oh! shut up, old boy, there's one who finds, and another who brings back. All on the strict Q. T."

The peasant was thunderstruck. He understood at last. It was insinuated that he had caused the pocket-book to be taken back by someone else, an accomplice.

He tried to protest, but the whole table began laughing.

He could not finish his dinner, and went away, with everyone jeering at him.

He returned home, ashamed and indignant, choking with anger and bewilderment, and all the more overwhelmed because, in his artful Norman brain, he knew himself capable of having done what they accused him of, and of even boasting about it afterwards, as though it were a feat. He realized confusedly that it would be impossible to prove his innocence, his tricky nature being known to all. And he felt wounded to the heart by the injustice of this suspicion.

Then he began again to tell his story, making the tale a little longer every day, adding new reasons every time, more energetic protestations, most solemn oaths which he thought out and prepared in his solitary moments, for his mind was solely occupied by the story of the piece of string. They believed him less and less as his defence became more and more elaborate, his arguments more subtle.

“H'm! that's only to cover up his tracks,” the hearers would say behind his back.

He was conscious of all this, but went on eating his heart out, exhausting himself in fruitless efforts.

Before the very eyes of people, he wasted away.

Jokers now would make him tell them the "piece of string" to amuse them, as one makes old soldiers tell about their battles. His spirit, undermined, grew feebler and feebler.

Towards the end of December he took to his bed.

He died at the beginning of January, and in his last delirium still protested his innocence, repeating:—

"A little piece of string . . . a little piece of string . . . look, here it is, M. le Maire!"

QUEEN HORTENSE



QUEEN HORTENSE

IN Argenteuil she was called Queen Hortense; no one ever knew why. Possibly because she spoke in the tone of an officer giving orders, or because she was tall and bony and imperious, or perhaps because she ruled over a community of those domestic creatures dear to the hearts of old maids: fowls and dogs and cats, canaries and parrots. But she never spoiled her pets, never babbled those tender endearments that seem to pour so naturally from women's lips over the velvet fur of their purring cats; no, she ruled her creatures autocratically—she reigned.

She was a regular old maid; one of those old maids whose voices are harsh and gestures spare, whose very soul seems to have hardened. She brooked neither contradiction nor reply, neither hesitation, carelessness, sloth nor fatigue. No one had ever heard her complain, express regret, or envy of anybody whatsoever. "Everyone has his lot in life," she used to say, with the conviction of a fatalist. She never went to church, disliked parsons, believed but little in God, and called all

things connected with religion, "pap for cry-babies."

During the thirty years she had occupied her tiny house with its little front-garden bordering the street, she had never changed her mode of life, but her maids she changed pitilessly, as soon as they reached the age of twenty-one.

Without ever a sigh or tear she replaced her dogs and cats and birds when they died of old age or accident, interring the departed animals in a certain garden-bed by means of a small spade, then treading down the earth unconcernedly on top of them.

She had various acquaintances in the town among the families of business men who went to their office work in Paris every day. From time to time she was asked in to take a cup of tea with them in the evenings. She invariably fell asleep at these gatherings, and had to be waked up when it was time to go home. She never allowed anyone to escort her, for she was not afraid of anything either by day or by night. She seemed to have no liking for children.

She occupied herself with countless masculine labours, with carpentering and gardening, with the sawing and chopping of wood, and the repairing of her old house, even doing the mason's work herself, when necessary.

She had some relations who came to see

her twice a year, the Cimmes and the Colombels; her two sisters had married, one a herbalist, the other a man of small independent means. The Cimmes had no descendants, the Colombels possessed three: Henry, Pauline and Joseph. Henry was twenty, Pauline seventeen, and Joseph, who had arrived on the scene when it seemed impossible that madame should again become a mother, was only three. There was no particular bond of affection between the old maid and her relatives.

In the spring of 1882 Queen Hortense fell suddenly ill. The neighbours went for a doctor, but she would have none of him; and on a priest presenting himself, she got out of bed half dressed to turn him out of her house.

The little maid, dissolving into tears, made gruel for her. After three days in bed, things began to look so grave that her next-door neighbour, the cooper, on the advice of the doctor, who had insisted on re-entering the house, took upon himself to send for the two sets of relatives.

They came by the same train about ten in the morning, the Colombels bringing with them their little boy Joseph.

On arriving at the garden gate, the first thing they saw was the little maid sitting on a chair against the wall, weeping. The dog was lying asleep on the door-mat in the blazing

sun, and two cats were stretched out like dead things on the sills of the two windows, with closed eyes, and paws and tails extended.

A huge clucking hen was marshalling across the garden her squad of chicks clothed with yellow, fluffy down, and a large cage hanging on the wall, well supplied with chickweed, held a colony of birds twittering themselves hoarse in the sunshine of the warm spring morning. In another little cage, chalet-shaped, two love-birds sat side by side on their perch.

M. Cimme, a very stout, puffy person, who always got in first everywhere by pushing everybody, even women, out of his way, proceeded to ask:—

“ Well, Céleste, so things aren't going on well, eh ? ”

The little maid quavered out through her tears:—

“ She doesn't even know me now. The doctor says it's the end. ”

They all looked at each other. Mme. Cimme and Mme. Colombel instantly embraced without a word. They were extremely alike, having worn their hair in smooth bands all their lives, together with red shawls of French cashmere that blazed like furnaces.

Cimme turned to his brother-in-law, a pale, thin, sallow man, who was a martyr to dyspepsia and had a frightful limp, and said in a serious voice:—

“By Jove! We’re only just in time!”

But nobody volunteered to enter the dying woman’s bedroom on the ground floor. Even Cimme hung back. It was Colombel who first plucked up courage and went in, swaying this way and that like a ship’s mast, with the ferrule of his stick resounding on the flagstones.

The two women ventured next, and M. Cimme brought up the rear. Little Joseph had remained outside, fascinated by the sight of the dog.

A ray of sunlight fell across the middle of the bed, shining with peculiar brightness on the hands, which, nervously agitated, were opening and shutting unceasingly. The fingers worked as though possessed by thoughts, as if their movements had a definite significance, conveyed a meaning, obeyed a directing spirit. The rest of the body was motionless beneath the sheet. Not a quiver passed over the angular face. The eyes remained closed.

The dying woman’s relations, spreading in a semicircle, proceeded to gaze silently at the spasmodic heaving of her labouring chest. The little maid had followed them in, crying all the time.

At last Cimme asked:—

“Now, tell us what the doctor says exactly?”

The servant faltered:—

"He says she's to be left in peace, and there's nothing more to be done."

But suddenly the old maid's lips began to move. She seemed to be giving utterance to silent words, words hidden within her dying brain, and more and more rapid grew those strange movements of the hands.

All at once she began speaking in a little, thin voice, quite unlike her own—a voice that seemed to come from a great distance, from the depths of that heart which had never perhaps been opened till now.

Cimme made for the door on tiptoe, finding the scene too painful for him. Colombel, whose crippled leg was getting tired, sat down.

The two women remained standing.

Queen Hortense was babbling very fast now; no one was able to understand a word. She kept pronouncing names, many names, appealing tenderly to imaginary persons.

"Philip, come here, my boy; kiss mother! You love mother, don't you, my mannie? Rose, look after your little sister while I'm out! Don't leave her alone on any account, do you hear? And mind, I forbid you to touch the matches!"

For some seconds she was silent, then, in a louder voice, as if calling to someone: "Henriette!" She waited a little, then went on: "Tell your father I want to speak to him before he goes to the office." Then quickly:

"I'm not very well to-day, darling; promise me not to be late home. You can tell your chief that I'm ill. You know how dangerous it is to leave the children alone when I'm in bed. I'm going to give you a rice pudding for dinner. The children are so fond of it. Won't Clare be delighted, eh?"

She began laughing, a young, boisterous laugh utterly unlike her own. "Just look at Jean; what a face! He's messed it up with jam, the grubby little rascal. Oh! do look, darling; isn't he funny?"

Continually fidgeting his leg, which was tired from the journey, Colombel muttered:—

"She's dreaming that she's got a husband and children—it's the beginning of the end."

Stolid and amazed, the two sisters never stirred.

"Perhaps you'd like to take off your bonnets and shawls," said the little maid; "please to walk into the sitting-room."

They went out of the room without having said a single word.

Colombel followed them limping, and the dying woman was left quite alone again.

When they had taken off their outdoor things, the two women at last sat down. Whereupon, one of the cats got up from the window, stretched itself, sprang into the room, and then on to the knees of Mme. Cimme, who began stroking it.

They could hear the dying woman's voice close by, living in her last minutes an existence that she had no doubt been awaiting all her life long, emptying her heart even of her dreams at this moment when everything for her was coming to an end.

Cimme, in the garden, was playing with little Joseph and the dog, enjoying himself thoroughly, as a stout man out for a day in the country will do, with never a thought of the dying woman within.

But all of a sudden he came indoors, and said to the maid:—

“Look here, my girl, can't you see about our lunch? Ladies, what would you like to eat?”

They agreed on a savoury omelette, a piece of fillet of beef with some new potatoes, then cheese, and a cup of coffee.

And as Mme. Colombel was feeling in her pocket for her purse, Cimme stopped her, and turning to the maid, said:—

“I dare say you've got some money in hand?”

“Yes, sir,” she replied.

“How much?”

“Fifteen francs.”

“That's enough. Make haste, my good girl, I'm beginning to feel hungry.”

Mme. Cimme, looking out of the window at the climbing plants all bathed in sunshine,

and at two amorous pigeons on the roof opposite, said in a heart-broken voice:—

“It’s a pity to have had to come on such a sad errand; it should be so lovely in the country to-day.”

Her sister sighed without answering, and Colombel, uneasy at the very idea of a walk, murmured:—

“My leg’s worrying me confoundedly.”

Little Joseph and the dog were making a terrible noise, one shrieking with joy and the other barking desperately. They were playing at hide-and-seek round the three garden beds, and racing one after the other like two mad things.

The dying woman continued to call to her children, talking to each in turn, in imagination dressing them, kissing them, teaching them to read:—

“Come now, Simon, say, A, B, C, D. No, that’s not right. See, now! D, D, D, D, don’t you hear? Now, again. . . .”

“It’s curious what people say at such times,” pronounced Cimme.

Whereupon Mme. Colombel asked:

“Oughtn’t we to go back to her?”

But Cimme at once dissuaded her:—

“What’s the good? You can’t do anything to help. We might just as well stay here.”

Nobody insisted, and Mme. Cimme, turning her attention to the pair of green love-birds

(so-called), began to hold forth in praise of their singular fidelity, and inveigh against men for not following the example of these devoted creatures.

Cimme began to laugh, glanced at his wife, and hummed mockingly:—

“Tra, la, la; Tra, la, la, la,”

as if he wished a good deal to be understood on the subject of *his* fidelity.

Colombel, taken all at once with cramp in the stomach, began striking the ground with his stick.

The other cat now entered, its tail in the air.

It was one o'clock by the time they sat down to table.

Directly he had tasted the wine, Colombel, who had been recommended to drink nothing but superior Bordeaux, called the maid back:—

“I say, child, isn't there anything better than this in the cellar?”

“Yes, sir; there's the best wine, that you always used to have when you came.”

“Well, go and fetch us three bottles of it.”

This wine was tasted and found excellent; not that it was anything remarkable in the way of vintage, but it had been in the cellar fifteen years.

“It's a perfect wine for an invalid,” declared Cimme.

Colombel, seized by a violent longing to possess this Bordeaux, put another question to the maid:—

“ How much is there left, my girl ? ”

“ Oh ! Nearly the whole lot, sir ! Mam’zelle never drank it. It’s the bottom bin.”

Then turning to his brother-in-law, Colombel said:—

“ Cimme, I’ll take over this wine, if you like, against anything you may fancy. It suits me down to the ground.”

The hen had now come in with her brood of chickens, and the two women amused themselves throwing her crumbs.

Little Joseph and the dog, having had enough to eat, were sent back to play in the garden.

Queen Hortense still went on talking, but in a low voice now, so that the words were no longer distinguishable.

When they had finished their coffee, everyone went to see how the sick woman was going on. She seemed to be calm.

They went out again, and sat down in a circle in the garden, to digest their lunch.

All of a sudden the dog began flying round and round the chairs as hard as he could go, holding something in his mouth. The child pursued him desperately; then both disappeared indoors.

Cimme fell asleep with the sun full upon his stomach.

The dying woman again began talking aloud. Then, suddenly she cried out.

The two ladies and Colombel hastened indoors to see what was the matter. Cimme, though he woke up, did not stir; he could not bear that sort of thing.

Queen Hortense was sitting up, her eyes haggard. Her dog, to escape little Joseph, had leaped on to the bed, bounded across the dying woman, and, entrenched behind her pillow, was glaring at his playfellow with glittering eyes, ready to dash out again and begin the game afresh. He held in his teeth one of his mistress's slippers, all torn during the hour or more he had been playing with it.

The child, frightened by this woman suddenly rising up in front of him, stood motionless opposite the bed.

The hen now came in; alarmed by the noise, she flew on to a seat, and in heartrending clucks called to her chicks, who were chirping in a scared cluster round the four legs of the chair.

Queen Hortense cried out in a lamentable voice:—

“No, no. I don't want to die, I don't want to die! I won't. Who will bring up my children? Who will take care of them,

and love them? No, no, I won't die. I won't——”

She sank back again suddenly. It was all over.

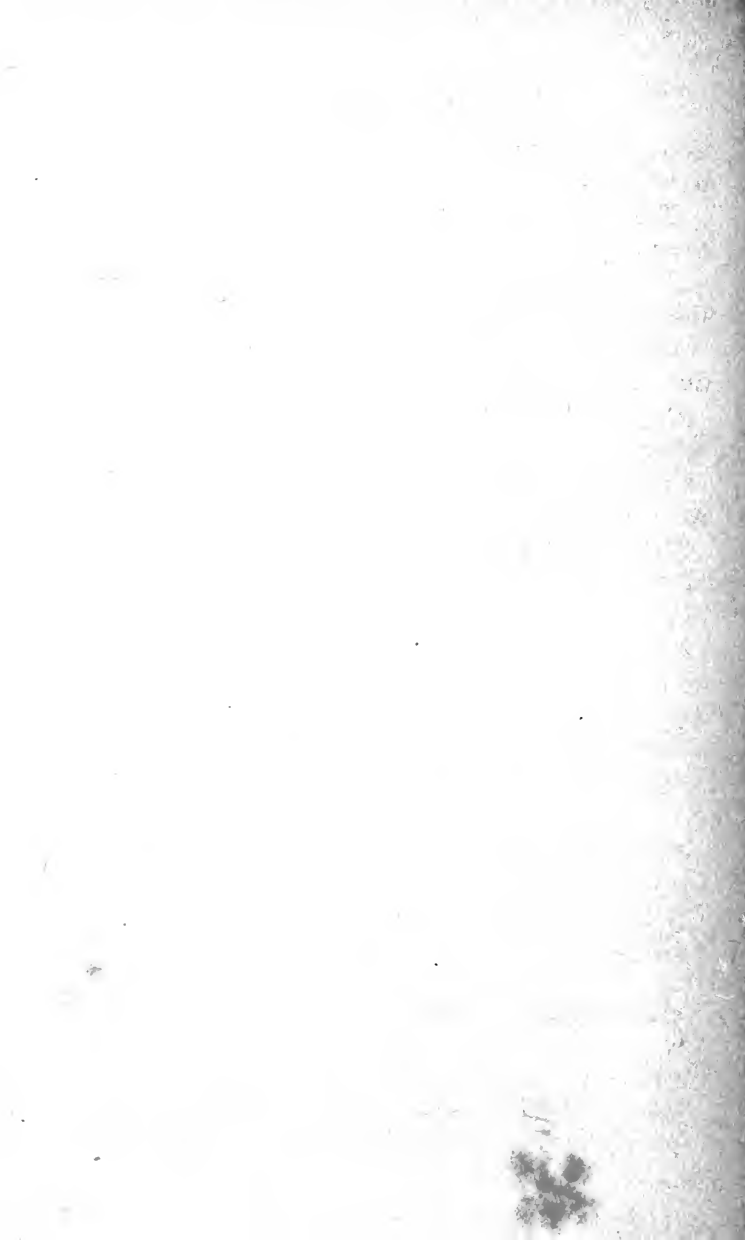
The dog, in great excitement, began rushing round and round the room.

Colombel ran to the window, and called out to his brother-in-law:—

“ Quick, quick. I fancy she's just passed away.”

Then Cimme got up, and, making up his mind, entered the room, stammering:—

“ It's taken less time than I should have thought.”



AT SEA



AT SEA

THE following paragraph appeared recently in the newspapers:—

“FROM OUR BOULOGNE CORRESPONDENT,
“*January 22nd.*

“A terrible disaster has just spread consternation among our fisher-folk, so severely tried during the last two years. The fishing-boat belonging to Captain Javel, on its way into port, was driven to the west of the harbour mouth, and dashed to pieces on the rocks forming the breakwater of the jetty.

“In spite of the efforts of the life-boat and the rocket-apparatus, four men and the boy were lost. The bad weather still continues, and further accidents are to be feared.”

I wonder who this skipper Javel is? Is it the brother of the man who had lost an arm?

If this poor fellow, carried off by the seas, and dying, entangled perhaps in the wreckage of his own boat, is the man I am thinking of, he took part eighteen years ago in another drama, terrible and simple as are all these formidable dramas of the sea.

This Javel, the elder of two brothers, was then skipper of a trawler. Of all fishing-boats the trawler is the most staunch. Strong enough to stand any kind of weather, round-flanked, tumbling about perpetually like a cork on the waves, lashed by the harsh, salt winds of the Channel, it toils upon the sea, with a bellying sail, untiring, dragging on its beam a great net that, scraping in the bed of the ocean, sweeps up and gathers in all the creatures that sleep among the rocks, flat fish sticking to the sand, heavy crabs with crooked claws, and lobsters with pointed whiskers.

When the breeze is fresh, with a short sea running, the boat starts work. The net of the trawl is fixed the whole length of a great wooden beam, banded with iron, which is let down by means of two ropes running over rollers at either end of the vessel.

And the boat, drifting broadside to wind and tide, drags with it this contrivance for the spoiling and devastation of the ocean plains.

Javel had with him on board his younger brother, four men, and a boy. He had left Boulogne in fine weather to start trawling. But the wind soon rose, and a gale coming on, the trawler was forced to run before it.

They made for the English coast, but a heavy sea was beating against the cliffs, and hurling itself on shore with such baffled fury

that it was impossible to attempt the entrance to any port. The little boat stood out again and made for the French coast. But the heavy weather still made it dangerous to go near the jetties, enveloping all approaches to the sheltering harbours with foam, uproar, and peril.

The trawler had to stand off again, riding over the waves, tossed and shaken and streaming, struck by great lumps of water, but behaving well in spite of all, quite used to rough weather that often kept her out five or six days at a time, stretching back and forth between the two neighbouring coasts, unable to land on either.

At last, while they were far from land, the storm abated, and though the seas still ran high, the skipper ordered the trawl to be got overboard.

The huge fishing machine was accordingly put over the side, and two men at bow and two at stern began to pay out the ropes of it. Suddenly it touched bottom, but a big sea making the boat roll, Javel the younger, who was in the bow tending the fore-warp of the trawl, stumbled, and got his arm caught between the momentarily eased rope and the roller over which it was passing. He made a desperate effort to lift the rope with his other hand, but the trawl was dragging already, and the taut warp could not be moved.

Writhing with pain, the man called for help. Everyone came running to him. His brother left the tiller. They threw themselves all together on the rope, trying to free the limb that was being crushed by it. It was no use.

"Must be cut!" said one of the "hands," pulling out of his pocket a huge knife, which was capable in a stroke or two of saving young Javel's arm.

But to cut the warp meant losing the net, and the net meant money, a great deal of money, fifteen hundred francs, and it was the property of the elder Javel, who could not bear to lose it. With anguish in his heart, he called out, "No, don't cut—wait! I'll luff up!" and rushing to the tiller he put it hard down. But the boat would not answer, her way deadened by the net which hampered her steering, and she swept on with the wind and the drift she already had on her.

Javel the younger had dropped on to his knees, with clenched teeth and haggard eyes. He did not utter a word. In continual dread of the knife being used, his brother came back again, "Hold on, hold on, don't cut; we'll let go the anchor."

The anchor was let go, the whole long chain running out; then they began heaving in at the capstan, to ease the trawl ropes, which slackened at last, and the inert limb was

disengaged, in its blood - stained woollen sleeve.

Javel the younger seemed to have become imbecile. His pea-jacket was removed, revealing a horrible sight, a shapeless pulp of flesh which spurted blood in jets as if forced from a pump. Then the man gazed at his arm, and muttered, "It's done for!" And, as the blood was making a pool on the deck one of the men exclaimed, "He'll bleed to death; we must tie the veins." Then they took a line, a coarse, brown, tarry yarn, and, twisting it round the limb above the wound, drew it taut with all their strength. The jets of blood grew gradually less, and at last ceased entirely.

Javel the younger got up, his arm dangling at his side. He took hold of it with the other hand, lifted it, turned it about, shook it. Everything was broken, the bones smashed; this fragment of his body hung by the muscles alone. He contemplated it with gloomy, thoughtful eyes. Then he sat down on a spare sail, and his mates advised him to keep the wound continually wet, to keep mortification from setting in.

They put a bucket near him, and every few minutes he dipped a glass into it and bathed the horrible place, letting a thin stream of clear water trickle over it.

"You'd be better down below," said his

brother. He went below, but came up again in about an hour's time, not liking to be alone; he had need of the fresh air too. So he sat down again on his sail and recommenced bathing his arm.

They had a good catch. Great white-bellied fish lay alongside of him, tossing about in their death-throes; he gazed at them without ever stopping the bathing of his mutilated flesh.

Just as they were nearing Boulogne a fresh gale sprang up; the little boat started off again on her senseless cruise, plunging and dipping, knocking the poor sad-faced wretch about.

Night came on. The bad weather continued till dawn. At daybreak they were again in sight of the English coast, but as the sea was going down, they started once more for France, tacking.

Towards evening Javel the younger called his mates to look at some black marks, an ugly appearance of decay in that part of the limb which could hardly be said to be his any longer. The "hands" gazed at it, and gave their opinions.

"It's the black rot, sure enough," thought one.

"Better pour salt water over it," declared another.

Some sea water was brought and poured

on to the wound. The sick man turned livid, ground his teeth, writhed a little, but did not cry out.

Then, when the burning pain had abated, he said to his brother, "Give me your knife."

The brother held out his knife.

"Hold up my arm, straight out; hang on to it tight."

What he asked was done.

Then he himself began to cut. He cut quietly and thoughtfully, severing the last sinews with that blade, which had an edge as keen as a razor's; and at last there was only the stump left. He heaved a deep sigh, and declared: "It had to be done! 'Twould ha' been all up with me!"

He seemed relieved, and kept taking deep breaths. He began again to pour water over the stump.

It was another rough night, and they were unable to get in.

When day dawned, Javel the younger picked up his severed arm and examined it minutely. Decomposition had set in. His messmates also came and examined it, passing it from hand to hand, tapping it, turning it over, sniffing at it.

His brother said: "It's about time to throw that into the sea."

But Javel the younger was annoyed. "Not if I know it! Not if I know it!" said he. "It

belongs to me, I suppose, seeing it's my own arm."

He took hold of it again, and placed it between his knees.

" 'T'll go bad all the same," said the elder. Then an idea seemed to strike the maimed man. When the boats are kept out a long time, the catch of fish is packed in barrels of salt to keep it fresh.

He asked: " Couldn't I put it in the brine ?"

" Yes, you could do that," declared the others.

Whereupon they emptied one of the barrels already full of fish from the catch of the last few days, and right at the bottom they laid down the arm. A layer of salt was put over it, then, one by one, the fish were replaced.

One of the " hands " made the following joke: " Let's hope it won't get sold in the auction !"

At which everyone laughed except the two Javels.

The wind had not abated. They tacked about in sight of Boulogne till ten o'clock on the following morning. And the injured man continued without ceasing to pour water over his stump. Now and then he would get up and pace the deck from end to end. His brother, at the tiller, gazed after him, shaking his head.

At last they entered the harbour.

The doctor examined the wound, and pro-

nounced it to be going on as well as possible. He dressed it thoroughly, and prescribed rest for the patient. But Javel would not go to bed without having regained possession of his arm, and returned at once to the harbour to find the barrel, which he had chalked with a cross.

It was emptied in his presence, and he snatched up his arm, which, thoroughly pickled by the brine, was shrivelled, but quite fresh. He wrapped it in a cloth he had brought for the purpose, and went back home.

For a long time his wife and children examined this fragment of the father, touching the fingers, brushing away the grains of salt that had got under the nails. Then the carpenter was sent for, to take measurements for a little coffin.

Next day the whole of the trawler's crew followed the funeral of the severed arm. The two brothers, side by side, were chief mourners.

The sexton of the parish carried the corpse under his arm.

Javel the younger gave up the sea. He obtained some light employment at the harbour, and later on, when talking about his accident, he would whisper confidentially in his listener's ear: "If my brother would only have cut the rope, I should have had my arm now, right enough. But he was thinking of his pocket."

A SALE



A SALE

THE parties, Brument (Cæsar Isidor) and Cornu (Prosper Napoleon), were appearing before the Lower Seine Assize Court on a charge of attempting to murder the woman Brument, lawful wife of the first named, by drowning.

The two accused are seated side by side on the time-honoured bench. They are both peasants. The first is little and fat, with short arms, short legs, and a round, red, pimply head planted direct upon the trunk, which is also round and short, and devoid of any appearance of neck.

He is a pig-breeder, living at Cacheville-la-Goupil, in the district of Criquetot.

Cornu (Prosper Napoleon) is thin, of medium height, with enormously long arms. His head is askew, his jaw twisted, and he has a squint. A blue blouse as long as a shirt falls to his knees, and his thin, yellow hair, plastered down on his skull, gives his face a worn-out, dirty, fallen-in kind of look, that is really frightful. He bears the nickname of "the parson," because he can imitate Church chanting to perfection, and even the

tones of the serpent.* He is an innkeeper at Criquetot, and this talent of his attracts to the inn plenty of customers who prefer "mass a la Cornu" to mass proper. Mme. Brument, seated in the witness-box, is a thin country-woman who looks half asleep throughout the proceedings. She sits motionless, her hands crossed on her knees, with a fixed stare and stolid expression.

The magistrate continues his inquiry. "So, Mme. Brument, they came into your house and threw you into a barrel full of water. Now, tell us the facts in detail. Stand up."

She stands up, looking as tall as a ship's mast, her cap topping her head with white. She makes her statement in a droning voice:

"I was shellin' beans. They comes in. I says to myself: 'What's the matter with 'em? They look funny; they're up to something.' They kept watchin' me sideways, like this—'specially Cornu, 'cos, you see, he squints. I never likes to see them two together; they're never up to any good when they're together. I says to 'em: 'What d'you want with me?' They didn't give no answer, and I felt sort o' frightened like. . . ."

The prisoner Brument here suddenly interrupts the statement by exclaiming:

"I was tight."

Whereupon Cornu, turning to his accom-

* An out-of-date musical instrument, used in church.

plice, pronounced, in a voice as deep as the bass note of an organ :

“ If ye said we were both tight, ye wouldn't be far wrong.”

The magistrate (severely): “ You mean to say that you were drunk ?”

Brument: “ That's about it.”

Cornu: “ 'T might happen to anyone.”

The magistrate (to the victim): “ Go on with your statement, Mme. Brument.”

“ Well,” she resumed, “ Brument, he says to me, ‘ Would ye like to earn a crown ?’

“ ‘ Yes,’ says I, ‘ seein' ye don't pick a crown-piece off the road every day.’

“ ‘ Well, look sharp, then,’ he says to me, ‘ and do what I tell ye ’; and off he goes to fetch the big open barrel that's underneath the gutter in the corner. Then he turns 'er over, then he gets 'er into my kitchen, and he stands 'er up on end in the middle o' the room, and he says to me, ‘ You go an' fetch water,’ he says, ‘ an' keep on pourin' it in till she's full.’

“ So off I goes to the pond with two buckets, and I keeps on fetchin' water, an' more water, an' more water, for a good hour. That old barrel's as big as a vat, savin' your worship's presence.

“ All that time Brument and Cornu they was havin' drinks, first one, and then another, and then another. They was just gettin' their

back teeth under, both of 'em, and I says to 'em: ' It's you that's full up, that's what you are—fuller than that there barrel.'

" So Brument he gives it me back: ' Don't you worry yourself,' says he; ' go on wi' your work, your time's comin'—everyone mind his own business.' But I didn't take no notice, he bein' tight.

" When the barrel was full to the brim, I says: ' There you are.' And Cornu he gives me a crown-piece. 'Twasn't Brument, 'twas Cornu that giv' it to me.

" And Brument he says to me: ' D'ye want to earn another ?'

" ' Yes,' says I, ' seein' I'm not used to gettin' presents so easy.'

" ' Well,' he says, ' undress yourself !'

" ' Undress !' says I.

" ' Yes,' says he. ' If ye feel it awkward-like,' he says, ' ye can keep yer shift on,' he says; ' we don't mind that.'

" A crown's a crown, so I undresses; but it was clean against the grain, you understand, doin' it before them two good-for-nothin's. I takes off my cap, and then my bodice, an' then my skirt, and then my shoes.

" ' Brument,' he says, ' you can keep yer stockin's on too; we're a good sort, we are.'

" An' Cornu, he says: ' Yes ! we're a good sort, we are.'

“ So there I was, pretty near like our Mother Eve. Then up they get, an’ they could hardly stand, they was that tight, savin’ your worship’s presence.

“ I says to myself: ‘ Now, whatever are they up to ?’

“ And Brument he says: ‘ Are ye ready ?’

“ And Cornu he says: ‘ Ready! aye, ready!’

“ An’ if they didn’t catch hold o’ me, Brument by the head and Cornu by the heels, like a bundle o’ linen for the wash, as ye might say. And didn’t I just scream! An’ Brument he says: ‘ Hold your noise, ye cat!’

“ An’ they hoists me up over their heads and pops me into that there barrel full o’ water, an’ it just turned my blood cold, and froze the marrow in my bones.

“ An’ Brument says, ‘ Will that do ?’

“ An’ Cornu says, ‘ Aye! That’ll do.’

“ An’ Brument says, ‘ The head an’t in. That counts!’

“ An’ Cornu says, ‘ In wi’ the head.’

“ Then Brument he pushes my head right under, just as if he meant drownin’ me, and the water runs up me nose, and I begins to see Paradise, an’ then he gives me another shove, an’ down I goes.

“ Well, then, he must ha’ got scared. He pulls me out, and says, ‘ Take an’ dry yourself quick, ye scarecrow!’

“ An’ off I makes as hard as I can run to the parson, and he lends me a skirt belonging to his servant, seein’ I was pretty nigh naked, an’ he goes an’ fetches M. Chicot the keeper; an’ he goes off to Criquetot to fetch the police, and they all come to my house with me.

“ And there we find Brument an’ Cornu goin’ for each other like two rams.

“ Brument, he shouts, ‘ It’s a lie, I tell ye, there’s a cubic metre, for sure. That’s not the way to measure.’

“ Cornu, he howls, ‘ Four bucketsful, ’tisin’t hardly *half* a cubic metre. Hold your tongue, I say it’s all right.’

“ The brigadier claps his hands on ’em. That’s all.”

She sits down. There was some laughter in court. The jurymen looked at one another in astonishment. The magistrate pronounced, “ Prisoner Cornu, you seem to have been the instigator of this infamous plot. What have you to say ?”

Cornu gets up in his turn.

“ Your worship, we were tight.”

The magistrate replied gravely, “ That I know. Go on.”

“ I *am* going on. Well, Brument comes to my place about nine o’clock an’ calls for two drinks, an’ says to me, ‘ There’s one for you, Cornu.’ So I sit down opposite him, and I take my drink, an’ out o’ politeness, I stand

him one in return. Then he stands me one again, and I stand him another, and so we go on nippin' and nippin' till, about midday, we were properly fuddled.

"Then Brument he begins to cry, and that touches my heart, that does, an' I ask him what's the matter.

"He says to me, 'I must have forty pound by Thursday.' But that chills me off at once, ye understand. And then he proposes to me, point blank, 'I'll sell ye my wife.'

"I was tight, and I'm a widower. It stirred up my feelin's, I can tell ye. I didn't know her at all, his wife, but a woman's a woman, anyhow, an't she? So I ask him, 'How much d'ye want for her?'

"He thought a bit, or he pretended to. When ye're tight ye're not so very clear in the head, and then he answers, 'I'll sell her to ye by the cubic metre.'

"Well, that didn't surprise me, for I was as tight as he was, and as for the cubic metre, I knew all about that in my trade. It means a thousand litres, and it just suited me properly.

"Only there was still the price to settle. *That* all depends on the quality. I said to him, 'How much the cubic metre?'

"'Eighty pound,' he says.

"That made me jump like a rabbit, but then it struck me that a woman couldn't be

equal to more than three hundred litres. All the same I said, 'It's too dear!'

" 'Can't do it under,' says he. 'I should lose by it.'

" You an't a pig-dealer for nothing, you understand—he knows his trade. But if he's a bit sharp at selling lumps o' fat, I'm a bit sharper at selling drops o' liquor. Ha! ha! ha! So I said to him, 'If she was new goods, I don't say, but ye've had your wear and tear, she's second-hand. I'll give ye sixty pound the cubic metre, not a ha'penny more. Is it a deal?' 'Right,' he says, 'done with ye.'

" I said, 'Done,' too, and off we go, arm in arm. Must help each other along, y' know, in this life.

" But it came into my head uneasy-like, 'However are ye goin' to measure her without makin' her into liquid?'

" Then he explains me his notion, and 'twasn't so easy for him, seeing he was tight. 'I take a barrel,' he says to me, 'I fill it to the brim with water; I put her in, and I measure all the water that runs over; that'll do the trick.'

" I said to him, 'That's all very well, that is, but the water that runs over 'll run away. How are ye goin' to get it up?'

" And then he laughed at me for a softy, an' explained how there was nothing to do but

to fill up the barrel again, once his wife was out of it. As much water as ye put in again is the measure of what's to pay. Suppose there's ten bucketsful, that'll be one cubic metre. He an't so stupid after all when he is tight, the varmint!

"To cut it short, we got to his place, and I had a look at the female party. As far as beauty goes, she an't no beauty, ye can see that for yourselves, for there she sits. I said to myself, 'Never mind, 't all counts; I'm getting a new start in life, and good-looking or plain, they all answer the same purpose, eh, your worship?' An' then I noticed she was as thin as a lath, and I said to myself, 'Why, she won't make four hundred litres!' I know something about it, being in the liquor trade.

"As to the doing, she's told ye about that. I even let her keep her shift and her stockin's on, which was all to the bad for me.

"When it was done, if she didn't fly out of the place. 'Look out, Brument,' I says, 'she's off!'

"'Don't ye worry yourself,' he says, '*we* shall get her back all right. She'll have to come home to sleep. Let's measure what ye've got to pay me.'

"I measured. Not four bucketsful! Ha! ah! ah! ah!"

The prisoner gives way to such persistent laughter that a gendarme is obliged to slap

him on the back. Regaining his composure, he goes on: "To cut it short, Brument he declares, 'The bargain's off; it an't enough!' I bawl at him, he bawls at me, I bawl louder, he dots me one, I give 'im one better. It looked like lasting till the day o' judgment, seeing we were both tight.

"In come the gendarmes, and begin swearing at us, an' they put *handcuffs* on us and take us off to prison. I ask for damages."

He sits down.

Brument declares his accomplice's confession to be true in every detail. The astounded jury retire to consider their verdict.

They came back in an hour's time, and acquitted the prisoners, but added a severe rider, pointing out the sanctity of marriage, and laying down the exact limits proper to commercial transactions.

Brument set out for the conjugal abode in company with his wife.

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